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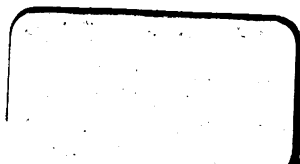
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VOL. III.



LONDON:

T. CAUTLEY NEWBY, PUBLISHER,
80, WELBECK STREET, CAVENDISH SQUARE.

1872.

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249. y. 590.

THE GLADSTONES.

CHAPTER I.

ROBERT FISHER's first impulse was to creep stealthily up to the seat, that he might peep over Sarah Crisp's shoulder and ascertain who that letter was from, and what it was about. A moment's reflection, however, made him ashamed of the mean idea, and gliding softly away, he was soon out of his cousin's hearing. She, poor girl, did not linger longer in her favourite haunt than to read the precious document hurriedly over, and then set off in the direction of the farmstead as rapidly as her limbs could carry her.

"Whatever is it, Sarah, that keeps Robert out so late?" cried Mrs. Fisher, somewhere about nine o'clock. "His father will be home from market, I expect, every minute, and vexed he will be if the lad is roaming about those damp woods at this time of night. I hope to goodness he won't catch his death of cold with such fancies."

"Perhaps Robert has called in at the Vicarage to see the papers, aunt," suggested Sarah. "I heard him say a day or two ago that Parliament was trying to put on some new malt-tax, and I shouldn't wonder if he's gone to see what 'The Times' says about it."

"Tax! tax! tax! I'm fairly sick of the word," exclaimed Mrs. Fisher, in a very angry voice, for such a mild tempered woman as she was. "Those nasty wars and victories are enough to break one's heart, they bring so many taxes after them."

"I once heard poor father say," observed Sarah, "that a victory was almost as bad as a defeat sometimes. If the French are as

heavily taxed for their defeats as we are for our victories it will be some time before they go to war again, I should think."

Mrs. Fisher's thoughts were with her son in that damp, gloomy wood.

"I wish thy uncle hadn't taken the lantern with him," she said, after a minute's pause. "If we had it, Sarah, you and I could have gone down to the meadow bottom and tried to find that silly lad."

Sarah noticed how her aunt's face grew white and red by turns, as it always did when she was uneasy about Robert. She put down her knitting and said—

"If you wish it, aunt, I will go up to the Vicarage and ask if Robert has been there to-night. I think he must be there."

"Somebody might do you an injury, Sarah, this dark night. I will go myself," said her aunt.

"I think that's Robert's step at the door," said Sarah, who had been listening intently. "It cannot be uncle, at any rate, for the old

mare would have made a very different noise to that."

Robert at this moment opened the door and came in.

"You will catch your death of cold, lad," said his mother, taking his hat and stick from his hand and placing a chair for him near the blazing fire. "I was just about starting off to the Vicarage to hear if you had been there."

"I have been safely housed, mother, though not at the Vicarage," said her son, kissing her affectionately. "Where is father?"

"At market still, dear man. He would have been terribly angry had he come back and found you out at this time of night. I am surprised you can be so imprudent, Robert."

"Oh! you know it's my way, mother. I like to be out these dark, still, autumn nights."

"I can't imagine who it was taught you such fancies, Robert; I'm sure neither I nor your father have such tastes. What do you say, Sarah?"

"I prefer moonlight," said Sarah, who had

been sitting in the shade of the chimney all this time, and perfectly understood why it was her cousin never glanced over to the place where she was resting.

Mrs. Fisher lighted a candle and sat down near her son.

"Now tell me where you've been, Robert?" she asked, in a pleasanter tone, as she drew her spinning wheel out of a corner and settled herself to work. "There's so few houses hereabout that you care to go into that I can't imagine where you've been if not to the Vicarage."

"I'd rather not tell you, mother," said Robert, abruptly. "I'm sure you wouldn't know if I were to try and explain."

Sarah noticed the shadow that stole across Mrs. Fisher's pleasant features at this more than unsatisfactory speech, and her heart sympathised with the pang she knew must have agitated that loving mother's heart at the words.

"Robert is tired, aunt," she whispered,

without daring to look at either of them. "You know, he is scarcely strong yet, and he has been out ever since tea."

"You are right, Sarah," said her cousin, in his cold, measured voice, "I shall go to bed, mother," and taking up his candle, he kissed her, and left the room.

Nothing was heard in the kitchen where the two women were left by themselves for several minutes but the monotonous buzz of Mrs. Fisher's spinning-wheel, and the sharp click of Sarah's needles. The latter, however, knew the tears were chasing each other down her aunt's comely cheek, and that her heart was heavy within her at the return she received for her long and patient love of her only son.

Sarah was perplexed to know how to break the silence so long maintained between her aunt and herself. At length she said—

"I wish November was here."

"Why, Sarah?" demanded her aunt, in desponding tones.

"Because then I shall be obliged to leave

you, aunt, and Robert will become as he used to be in the good old times before I came to Chilworth."

"What makes you think that, lass?" demanded Mrs. Fisher.

"Robert never had any of these gloomy fits upon him before I came, had he, aunt?" asked Sarah, dropping her work into her lap, and looking fixedly at her companion.

"No, he certainly had not, Sarah," said Mrs. Fisher, "but why should you have such an effect upon his temper. I'm sure Robert does not grudge the bite and the sup we give you and the lads."

"No, aunt, I'm sure he does not," said Sarah.

"Then what made you say what you did, lass?"

"Why, aunt, something has passed between my cousin and me that can only be put right by my leaving Chilworth; and that is why I wish November was here."

It had never entered Mrs. Fisher's head

that her son could by any possibility admire the pale, quiet-looking girl her husband had brought home to live with them, after attending the funeral of William Crisp and his wife. Still less could she have imagined that Sarah could have refused Robert, had he made her an offer of marriage! Now, however, the truth flashed upon her in a moment, and she asked the question with a degree of eagerness that was very uncharacteristic in either word or deed.

Sarah's silence was the most assuring answer her aunt could possibly have received to the question.

"So you refused Robert, Sarah?" she said, in no slight bewilderment.

Again Sarah was silent, and again Mrs. Fisher's thread broke, the accident caused by the agitation made her hand tremble more violently than it had probably ever done in her life before.

"Poor Robert! poor Robert!" murmured the mother, sadly, as her loving heart pictured

the grief with which her son had had to struggle so long in silence and despair. "Sarah, I can forgive him all now that I know this."

"And me too, aunt," cried the agitated girl, dropping upon her knees, and burying her face in Mrs. Fisher's lap. "I have been sorely tried, too, dear aunt—I have had—" and here her fortitude forsook her, and she burst into a violent flood of tears.

"Get up, Sarah, my love, I forgive and forget it all," said Mrs. Fisher, through her sobs. "Robert had no right to expect that you could desert poor Harry Jobson, even for him. Only promise me that your uncle shall never be told this. Oh, dear! how sadly vexed it would make him if he knew what had happened."

"Aunt," said Sarah, after another pause, "Don't you think I had better go to York at once? Robert, I am certain, will feel uncomfortable so long as I am in the house."

The mother's heart was already prepared

for this speech, and yet she felt a severe pang at hearing this unselfish thought spoken with so much calmness.

"I don't deserve that Robert should have such kindness for me, aunt," continued the niece, a blush suffusing her pale cheek; "and yet I am sure, as long as I stay here, he'll be good for nothing, but will continue moping about as he has done ever since he got better. If you will go so far with me I could walk into Bradford to-morrow, and call upon Miss Gladstone. I have no doubt old Hannah will give me a bed for one night, for old acquaintance sake."

"Well, Sarah, if you have made up your mind to the plan, I have nothing to say against it," rejoined Mrs. Fisher. "I'm afraid Robert thinks too fondly of you for his own peace of mind; and if you think your going away for a time will induce him to get the notion out of his head, I won't say nay to the scheme. What shall I tell your uncle to account for this hurried leaving Chilworth?"

"Tell him I was uneasy about poor Harry," said Sarah, with a blush. "He will forgive me for that. Besides, it only wants about a fortnight to the assizes."

"Well, I will tell him all to-night, and then it will be off my mind," said Mrs. Fisher. "I want a few things from Bradford, which I may as well bring back with me to-morrow, so that it won't be such a great loss of time after all. Well, I never should have dreamed of Robert falling in love with you, Sarah."

"Nor I, aunt. He never paid me any particular attention, to lead me to expect anything of the kind. I do so hope he will soon get the fancy out of his head."

"I am afraid he won't, Sarah," said Mrs. Fisher, "he has such strong, deep feelings in him; feelings few give him credit for possessing. His father says he's stubborn."

"He has been very kind to me," said Sarah, in a low voice, "and that makes me so sorry for him."

"Well, I hope Harry Jobson will get out

of prison in a week or two, and that you and he will make the marriage up quickly, and then Robert can dance at the wedding," said Mrs. Fisher, in quite a pleasant tone of voice. "Cheer up, lass, and let me see some colour in those pale cheeks of yours. Robert will find a wife, depend on it, some of these days, or I'm no true woman."

"Good-bye, Sarah," said Mr. Fisher, phlegmatically, the next morning, as he sat near the open door pulling on his boots; "I suppose we shall have you back again soon?"

"I hope so, uncle," although she had made up her mind not to come back unless Robert went away, "if Harry gets free."

"Oh! he'll be sure to do that," said her uncle, shaking her by the hand. "Harry Jobson never fired Mr. Gladstone's foundry, or my name is not Fisher."

"Well, uncle, I hope you are a true prophet," said Sarah, smiling "Good-bye again."

"I wonder if Robert will come to bid me

good-bye?" thought Sarah, as she sat ready dressed in the parlour waiting for her aunt, "I'm sure he knows I am going, for I overheard Bobby telling him I was going to York to stay till the trial was over."

If she expected anything of the kind she was doomed to disappointment, for Robert did not come out of his room until the pedestrians were on the road. Looking back, Sarah saw him go stealthily into the garden, and walk towards the summer-house with his chin buried in his breast. She had need of all the hopefulness of her character to look and speak cheerfully after this; but Mrs. Fisher thought that she was in excellent spirits, not for a moment suspecting the effort the poor girl had to make to appear so.

Although not an educated woman, Mrs. Fisher had a deep and earnest admiration for the beauties of nature, which, aided by one of those brilliant autumn days that seem as if they were sent to add to the rigour of winter and make its approach the more appalling,

made the otherwise long walk into Bradford one of actual pleasure to poor Sarah.

"Just look up there, lass," said Mrs. Fisher, stopping; "I wish we had a long stick with a crook at the end of it, that we might get some of those fine clusters of nuts that hang so temptingly over our heads."

"I wish so too," said Sarah, "but I fear wishing won't help us without the stick, aunt."

"If we turn up yonder lane we shall avoid Braidsworth entirely," said Mrs. Fisher, the next minute. "It's a long time since I used to go nutting there. It was before I was married," she added, with a sigh.

"I should have thought you would have forgotten it by this time," said the niece, with a smile.

"Not I, lass. We never forget anything we did and said when we were young. Do you see that stile? We must get over that and cross the cornfields beyond. I wonder who that lazy fellow is who has not got in his barley yet. I hope you are not tired, Sarah."

"Oh! no, aunt, I could walk double the distance," said the niece, hopefully.

"I am glad of that, for I am going to take you through some of the most beautiful scenery in all Yorkshire, so we mustn't either of us be tired for the present."

As Mrs Fisher spoke she led the way over the stile, and entered the corn-field she had before pointed out to her niece, until they reached the brow of a hill, where some of the most pleasing scenery, she had ever seen, opened before her eyes so suddenly as to induce her to utter an exclamation of delighted surprise.

"Is it not beautiful, my dear?" demanded Mrs. Fisher, as she leaned against a fine tree. "I've wanted Robert to make a picture of this view, but he says there's no painter in Europe could do justice to it."

"It is indeed a wonderful piece of scenery," said Sarah. "How beautifully the side of the valley is studded with trees."

"Yes, lass, it is; and only look at the

crimson tints of autumn. Now just cast your eyes a little beyond, and observe the sparkling waters that dash over that old wheel. Would it not make a beautiful picture?"

"I think so," rejoined Sarah. "But what is the name of the village you can just see through that clump of trees?"

"That is Hawstead, where your uncle Fisher was born," answered Mrs. Fisher. "Don't you see the mill-dam yonder? That village, with the church steeple peeping over the two or three thatched houses that you can see, is Brandon."

"But how do you get there, aunt? I can't see any path leading down from this hill."

"Oh! there's a path through the woods, which I will show you all in good time. If you are sufficiently rested we will go on."

Mrs. Fisher plunged boldly into the wood, calling out to Sarah to be careful that the boughs of the trees she parted in her progress did not fly back and strike her in the face.

In less than ten minutes they got safely

through the wood, and then the path led through those green meadows Sarah had admired so much from a distance, and which looked still more beautiful on a nearer view.

"I could find my way in the dark through these fields, my dear," said Mrs. Fisher, in her cheerful voice, "and yet I have not been here for many years."

"I wonder, aunt, you have not come often in all these years," said Sarah. "Why, I suppose it will be near upon twenty since you were here last?"

"Four-and-twenty, lass," said Mrs. Fisher, gravely. "Dear! dear! how time does slip away to be sure. I was a bonnie, high-spirited girl when I last set eyes upon this spot, I can tell you. Why, I declare, there's the very stump of a tree your uncle and I used to be so fond of sitting near in our courting days! I wonder it hasn't been chopped up for fire-wood years ago."

"Well, I'm sure Brandon is the prettiest place I almost ever saw," observed Sarah, as

the path led them in front of the church.
"What a beautiful lawn!"

"That's the Vicarage, Sarah," said Mrs. Fisher, stopping to admire the picturesque looking Vicarage, which was almost buried in a profusion of creeping plants, now, however, showing symptoms of the approach of winter. "Many and many a time I've stood on that lawn, just in front of that rustic seat, to say my catechism, when a child."

"The Vicar seems to be very fond of old-fashioned flowers," said Sarah, as she lingered near the gate to inhale the delicious perfume of the sweet-briar and late flowering stocks. "It's quite an old-fashioned place altogether."

"The Vicar's sister had the sweet-briar planted when she first came to live here," said Mrs. Fisher, in an almost melancholy tone; "and I see the old man still keeps up his sister's fancy."

After making this observation, Mrs. Fisher walked away at such a rapid pace that Sarah had great difficulty in keeping up with her.

Strange as it may seem, the unaltered aspect of everything pained her more than the entire obliteration of the familiar scenes of early years would have done ; it was saddening to feel that she alone was changed, although the years had passed over her head with so few cares or sorrows.

"I wonder what Miss Frances Gladstone will say to us?" said Sarah, after a long silence, during which her companion's mind had been busy with memories of former years.

"Nothing but what is pleasant, at any rate, lass," said Mrs. Fisher, rousing from her dreamy state ; "she's a kind, amiable, young lady, if ever there was one, and wouldn't forget an old friend, however humble, for the wealth of the world. We shall receive a kind welcome, I'll be bound."

"They say Mr. William has paid off every farthing of his debts," said Sarah, quietly.

"I am certain he would do that as long as ever he had a farthing left to pay with, though

he had to work for his daily bread for the rest of his life."

"I believe all of them work now, except Miss Sophia."

"Poor decrepit thing, she can do little in the way of work," said Mrs. Fisher, in a pitying tone. "It must be a wearisome life that of hers. Fancy, lying day after day as she does on the sofa."

"She never complains, or looks weary," said Sarah, who when a child had often spent whole days with Miss Gladstone, who liked the merry, noisy elf, all the more for her playful gambols. "She has such a sweet temper—all the pain in the world couldn't sour it."

"What poor, weak mortals we are, when God afflicts us," said Mrs. Fisher, who had all her life known neither pain nor ache. "And what do they say about Miss Kate, pray?"

"Nothing, but that she grows prettier and prettier every day, aunt, and that Mr. Wild-

ing grows more in love with her every time he sees her."

"I'm sorry for it, and can't say I admire his taste, Sarah. To my mind, Miss Frances is much prettier."

"She grows more upon you, aunt, with her calm, sweet face and pleasant, quiet ways," said Sarah, with critical acumen. "I should not wonder in the least if Miss Frances gets married first, after all. They do say Miss Kate is a sad flirt, and teases Mr. Wilding terribly."

"Then, if I was Mr. Wilding I'd have nothing more to say to her; a girl that can torment the man she intends to marry must have no feeling and no heart to give him. Dear! dear! how some folks are led away by a pretty face. Now, Miss Frances has both head and heart, I should say; there's more good common sense—and that's the best sort of sense—in that little head of hers—worth all the pretty cheeks and beaming eyes that

ever made fools of the men since the world began."

"There's Bradford," said the aunt, the next moment, as they gained the top of the hill and saw the town lying at their feet. "Please God, we'll soon be there; I'm getting tired, and shall be glad to get a cup of tea to freshen me up a trifle."

"What a black pall lays over the town," said Sarah, "and what a contrast to the brightness of the country we have just left behind us."

"And what a difference between the deafening sound of those forge hammers in comparison with the stilless of Nature," rejoined Mrs. Fisher, as they entered the street leading to the terrace in which the Gladstone family were residing.

Mrs. Fisher began to feel nervous and ill at ease the nearer she approached the presence of the young ladies, whom, until now, she had only known in the height of their prosperity;

whilst Sarah was quietly speculating upon the precise words with which Frances Gladstone and old Hannah would welcome her to their new home.

"It isn't Braidsworth, aunt?" said Sarah, breaking the silence, as they approached the Gladstones' house.

"There's more country about Braidsworth, Sarah; more trees and grass—and country people like the green pastures—and yet I cannot but say Bradford is a fine place after all. See there, niece, isn't that Miss Frances looking at us from that window yonder?"

Frances Gladstone it undoubtedly was, and the next minute she was in the narrow slip of garden in front of the house, dragging rather than leading Mrs. Fisher into the neat passage, and bidding both the aunt and niece welcome with many kind speeches, enquiring after Mr. Fisher and Robert and Sarah's brothers all in a breath.

"All nicely, thank you, Miss Frances," was Mrs. Fisher's delighted reply, "and how

is Miss Sophia, and Miss Kate, and Mr. Gladstone too."

"All quite well," rejoined Frances; "Kate is on a visit to Miss Vinen at Braidsworth. This is a holiday, so I have got rid of my pupils for the day."

"The school trade must be a very healthy one, if I may judge from your looks, Miss Frances," said Mrs. Fisher, "you usen't to have such roses on your cheeks when you lived at 'The Rookery.'"

"I am beginning to like it very much," said Frances, with her usual frankness; "come up stairs at once and see my sister."

Mrs. Fisher had a great fear of Sophia Gladstone—the fear that the robust and the healthy often feel for the weak and the sickly; and it was with a considerable increase of nervousness that she followed Frances into the pleasant room that the loving care of the brother and sisters had provided for the poor invalid.

Rare and beautiful plants, many of them

still in bloom, chequering the sunlight streaming into the chamber, birds flitting about their cages, amidst all this bowery wealth and the warmth and snugness that pervaded, as it were, the atmosphere of the room, certainly took away somewhat of the trying ordeal that Mrs. Fisher was called upon to undergo. The quiet tone and sweet smile of poor Sophia soon dispelled the remaining trepidation, and the two ladies and their visitors were at once in the midst of an eager conversation about Braidsworth and its inhabitants, when Frances chanced to mention that Mrs. Jobson had been over from York the week before, and had called on her way.

“Poor old body! How does she bear her troubles?” asked Mrs. Fisher.

“I thought she looked thinner than usual,” said Sophia; “it must be a terrible thing to a mother to be called upon to bear so much for a son.”

“Our brother says he is confident Jobson is innocent,” said Frances addressing Sarah,

I do hope—we all hope—he will be acquitted.”

Sarah longed to tell them there would be one there at the trial who would clear poor Harry, but she restrained herself, and said in a low tone she was quite sure he would.

“ William says he will do all in his power to save him,” was the observation of one of the sisters. “ We had Dr. Vinen here last week, and he will attend the trial to give Harry a good character.”

“ No one can give him anything else,” said Sarah, blushing. “ I do hope all will yet be right.”

“ Sarah would say, Miss Frances, if she durst make so bold,” said Mrs. Fisher, summoning up courage at this juncture, “ that if you would give her the bite and the sup for a week or so, till the trial comes on, she would take it very kindly.”

Both the sisters, in a breath, declared that nothing would give them greater pleasure;

and Mrs. Fisher began to give herself credit for a great deal more diplomatic talent than she had ever before fancied herself possessor of. She was too wise a woman to take her leave the moment this little arrangement was made, but remained chatting away till Mr. Gladstone came in to dinner, and he was far too hospitable to permit her to go away as hungry as she had come. Sarah and herself were turned over to the tender mercies of old Hannah, who looked as hearty and sturdy as ever, notwithstanding the loss of no small portion of her consequence.

"I suppose we shall be having a wedding soon, Mrs. Fisher," said Hannah, in a tone that was meant to be confidential. "Miss Kate is going to lead off the dance, after all, I fancy."

"I wish it had been Miss Frances," said her visitor.

"I'm sure I don't," retorted Hannah sharply; "what could we all do without her, pray? What could Miss Sophia do with such

a thoughtless bairn as Miss Kate? Or what could Mr. William do without Miss Frances? Why, she's his right hand woman, with that cool head and wise brain of hers. No, no, we cannot part with Miss Frances. They do say, though, that there's one across the seas that would fain win and wear her, little as she thinks of herself."

CHAPTER II.

ABOUT three quarters of a mile from Braidsworth there was a very romantic spot which had been a very favourite resort of both Kate and Frances Gladstone before they had gone to reside at Bradford. Winding up through craggy banks that were just sufficiently wooded to give beauty to the landscape without concealing the fine view that caught the eye at every turn, you could scarcely anywhere see all the characteristics of the locality to greater advantage than by following the brawling trout stream that had hewn itself a channel through the flinty rock, whose bold and rugged grandeur had of late been some-

what impaired by the pioneers of industry settled down in this locality.

The autumn of the year had been so mild and genial, so unlike the autumn of the North of England, that even in that latter end of October "Braidsworth Rocks" still looked beautiful beneath the rich glow of the noon-day sun.

At any rate it was fine enough to entice wanderers to walk further than they would otherwise have done, and more than one group of ladies might be seen sauntering under the trees. Among the rest Kate Gladstone and William Wilding had strolled about the walks and clambered over the crags until, quite exhausted, the former had seated herself on a mossy bank, half wishing all the time that she was at the Rectory, or even in Sophia's room at Bradford.

She did not look pleased. She was not pleased in fact, for she had begun to fancy she was ill used. Kate was at times the victim of shadowy miseries, which for the

nonce made her as unhappy as an actual grief would have done. Wilding sat watching her in silence, admiring her beauty, yet wishing at the same time she would look more pleasant.

"Do you go home to-morrow?" he asked, after a long silence.

"I cannot tell, William; if Mrs. Vinen wants my room for her visitors, I suppose I must."

"I heard Miss Vinen say only this morning, Kate, that their friends could not come until November."

"And November will be here almost directly," said Kate, crossly. "Besides, I am only in their way, so I will go home to-morrow."

"I wish you would not, Kate; these walks are so very pleasant, that I, for one, shall mourn for them after they are past and gone," said the young man passionately. "Dear little Kate, why will you make yourself so unhappy about trifles?"

"I'm sure I do not, William; and I wish you would not echo that odious idea of William's. You know well enough that Frances is his favourite."

"I know nothing of the kind, Kate; for I know that your brother is too wise a fellow to have favourites at all," said Wilding, warmly.

"Very well, Mr. Wilding," said Kate, in high dudgeon; "you are quite at liberty to keep your own opinion."

With the peculiar smile that sometimes flitted across Wilding's face when the spirit of mischief was stirring within him, the lover slid down to Kate's side, and began to caress her, very much after the fashion that he would have done some pretty, but naughty, spoiled child, kissing her forehead, patting her cheeks, and speaking to her in the half-mocking tone he sometimes assumed towards her.

Kate's anger was thoroughly aroused, but it was several moments ere she could disengage herself sufficiently from his caresses

to be able to rise. A red spot, as if all the blood that had been diffused over her countenance was gathered into one place, burned in the middle of her cheek, whilst the rest, with brow and lips, had become pale as alabaster. Her flashing eyes showed how deep was the passion that Wilding's unfortunate teasing had called forth. She drew her shawl around her trembling limbs, stood for a single moment as if summoning up her resolution, and then ran off towards Braids-worth as rapidly as she could.

"Wilding must be taught that I am not the weak, silly fool, he takes me to be," she muttered to herself, as she hurried in the direction of the Rectory. "He thinks me little better than a child, because I have not Frances's imperturbable indifference, or William's sarcastic humour. I must make him understand my character better, before we link our fates together, or nothing but misery can possibly be the result."

Thoroughly roused as her feelings were, her eyes, nevertheless, filled with tears. Her mind, too, was so agitated that she was quite unconscious of the rapid rate at which she was speeding, until her foot came in contact with the stump of a tree, making every nerve in her slight figure tremble, as she fell forward to the ground.

When she regained her feet, she perceived a stain of blood upon her glove, and discovered that she had lacerated her hand in falling. To add to her distress, she heard footsteps advancing towards her, whilst the pain of her sprained ankle was so acute that she could not summon up courage to attempt to limp off the path to permit the new comer to pass.

"Miss Gladstone!" exclaimed a deep manly voice. "What has happened?"

Kate raised her eyes, and perceived the speaker to be a gentleman she had met once or twice lately at the Rectory, a Captain

Silvester, whose father, Mr. Silvester, had, in fact, hired "The Rookery" when her brother was compelled to leave Braidsworth.

"I am delighted at this fortunate meeting," said the Captain, whose countenance by no means gave the lie to his words, "but what is the matter?" he exclaimed, with an appearance of alarm spreading over his handsome face. "I am afraid you are hurt, there are spots of blood upon your dress."

"I was walking rather rapidly," said Kate, composedly, as she glanced down at the crimson spots that sullied the purity of her white dress, "and not seeing the stump of a tree, some inches above the ground, I caught my foot against it and fell. I fear I have sprained my ankle."

"And have wounded yourself more than you care to confess," said Captain Silvester, with a kindness in his tone that contrasted strongly with the treatment she had just received at her lover's hands. "Pray do me the favour of leaning upon my arm; I know

from sad experience, my dear Miss Gladstone, how excessively painful these sprains are. I perceive that you walk not only with great difficulty, but with much pain."

He was stooping over her as he said these words, in tones the most tender, yet respectful, it is possible to imagine, his manly, well-proportioned figure being thrown into an attitude so graceful that a sculptor might have longed to transfer it to marble, whilst his handsome features betrayed the most tender concern and sympathy.

Sauntering down the wood, William Wilding saw the captain stooping over the beautiful girl Wilding expected one day to make his wife, and with a jealous pang he watched him offering Kate all those delicate attentions which her situation demanded, and which her helplessness compelled her to accept at his hands.

Wilding, however, was not aware that Kate was hurt.

"This unlucky accident will, I fear, confine

you to a couch for a few days, Miss Gladstone," said Captain Silvester, as they walked very slowly towards Braidsworth. Slow, however, as was their progress, it was far too rapid for him. "I heard that you intended leaving the Rectory to-morrow."

"I did; I believe I am expected at home," said Kate, who really felt grateful for his kindness, although, poor little fool, she was already beginning to regret the step she had taken with regard to William Wilding. "I hope you will not prove a true prophet."

"No one at the Rectory will regret the unlucky accident," said her companion. "Miss Vinen will do her best to alleviate your pain, and make your captivity pleasant."

William Wilding all this time was following, noting with the lynx eye of a jealous lover how Kate seemed to cling to the arm of her companion for support.

"What a charming place 'The Rookery' is," said Captain Silvester, as they caught a glimpse of it just at the moment. "You

must have been very sorry to have left it."

"Very, indeed," replied Kate, who, as she was suffering much pain, began to wish herself at the Rectory. "You are, perhaps, aware that my father built it, and had the grounds laid out under his own direction."

"My mother has often wished she could meet with any of your family at the houses she visits in the neighbourhood. I will bring her to call on Mrs. Vinen to-morrow," said her companion. "I'm afraid Miss Gladstone, you are suffering great pain."

Kate had difficulty in summoning up courage to deny this, and very glad she was when at last she reached the Rectory gates, where they found Mrs. Vinen busy amongst her flowers, gardening being one of the good lady's great passions.

A few words from Captain Silvester made Mrs. Vinen acquainted with the whole affair.

"It was very fortunate Kate had the good fortune to meet with you, sir," said

Mrs. Vinen with cordiality. "The exertion she would have been compelled to submit to might have been very serious. I hope Captain Silvester we shall have the pleasure of seeing you at the Rectory this evening."

Captain Silvester thanked Mrs. Vinen for this impromptu invitation, and presuming upon the service he had already rendered pretty Kate, insisted upon accompanying her to the house.

He took leave at the porch with the same grace and quiet manner that had characterised his whole conduct since his first meeting with Kate in the wood, leaving, it must be confessed, a very strong impression indeed upon the young lady's mind.

Mrs. Vinen's remedy for the sprain was both simple and efficacious; the ankle was bandaged with soft linen saturated with Eau de Cologne, the linen not allowed to get dry for five or six hours, when the pain subsided; and then Amelia having dressed her out with her usual exquisite taste, Kate

looked prettier than ever, and with her friend's assistance limped to a couch in the drawing-room, and took up a book to amuse herself during the hour that must elapse before Mrs. Vinen's guests could be expected to arrive.

Kate, it must be acknowledged, did the author poor justice, for her rebellious heart was throbbing too wildly to permit her feeling the slightest interest in the most charming tale ever written. William Wilding and Captain Silvester were battling for the mastery, and the letters in the book seemed to run into each other, as they passed before her eyes, and form one or the other of those talismanic names.

She was aware that William Wilding had an invitation to the Rectory for that evening, and she hoped, notwithstanding all that had passed, he would come, that they might make up their quarrel, and then all would end happily. She could not help admitting to herself that she loved him, that she would die

for him or live *with* him, no matter how humble or how lowly their lot might be. Then Captain Silvester's handsome face looked over the book, and the deep earnest voice that, for short a time as she had heard it, had already become deeply engraven in the deep recesses of her brain, repeated over the manly, yet gentle speeches that had made Kate's otherwise painful walk a pleasure of the most exquisite description.

"What kind of woman is Mrs. Silvester, Amelia?" Kate asked, looking up at last, "the lady, I mean, who lives at 'The Bookery.' She is not Captain Silvester's wife, I believe?"

"No—his mother," said Amelia, laughing. "She is a very grand old lady I assure you."

"In what way? Is she proud?"

"I didn't say she is proud. She is not what I call proud. High toned I should call her, rather."

Kate mused for a moment, as if she was trying to fathom Amelia's meaning; but alas!

it was far too deep for her to solve, so she asked a second question.

“Has she been handsome?”

“Judging from the remains of beauty she still possesses, she has been decidedly handsome. She has one of those delicately clear complexions that somehow outlast fifty brilliant red and white.

“And her eyes?” rejoined Kate.

“Oh! very fine eyes—Captain Silvester inherits the latter, I think.”

Those very fine eyes, it must be confessed, had played sad havoc with Kate’s heart, but she went on quite coolly, as none but women can do, when discussing life and death topics, as if they were nothing of more consequence than the last Parisian “duck of a bonnet.”

“Is Mr. Silvester rich, Amelia?”

“I am really quite unable to tell you, Kate, but I will ask papa, if it is a matter of consequence for you to know,” said Amelia, with a very peculiar smile.

"Nonsense, Amelia," cried Kate, laughing heartily, "why should I wish to know?"

"I thought, perhaps, you might have become tired of William Wilding," said Amelia, significantly. "But rich or not rich, Mr. Silvester is a very fine old gentleman, and the son is—"

"Never mind Captain Silvester," interrupted Kate hurriedly. "I wonder why William is so late in coming."

"I don't think he will come to-night," said Amelia, speaking quite at random. "I fancy he looked tired and out of spirits to-day when he called."

Kate's heart smote her bitterly at this moment, but her regrets were soon put to flight by the entrance of several ladies, who brought with them fresh faces and fresh ideas, some of both being very good, a few indifferent, and the rest rather bad.

"Where can Captain Silvester be going?" demanded one young lady, as she sat down on

the couch beside Kate. "I met him riding very rapidly towards Bradford."

"Perhaps going up to London," said Amelia, glancing furtively at Kate.

"I don't think that could be his errand," said Mrs. Vinen, who had been busily arranging the tea-table all this time.

"Why, mamma?"

"Because he promised to spend the evening with us. Go and tell Doctor Vinen tea is ready," she added, speaking to the servant.

"The Captain won't be here for an hour at the earliest," said Amelia Vinen, approaching the window. "I hope he won't be caught in the storm that is gathering behind the church."

CHAPTER III.

THE storm had blown over quite an hour before Captain Silvester made his appearance in Mrs. Vinen's drawing-room.

"We scarcely expected you," said Amelia, advancing from the group of young ladies that surrounded Kate's couch to shake hands with him. "Miss Westcot announced that you were on your way to London."

"I only rode into Bradford to let Mr. Gladstone know how very trifling was the accident his sister had met with, lest an exaggerated account might reach and alarm him and his sisters."

Kate's beautiful eyes expressed her thanks,

and Captain Silvester made his way to a chair at the back of the couch.

"Why did you not bring Mr. Gladstone back with you?" asked Miss Vinen.

"He was not at home."

"Then you had all your trouble to no purpose?"

"Not so; I was fortunate enough to have an interview with one of the most charming girls I ever remember to have met," returned the Captain.

"My sister Frances," said Kate, in a gratified voice.

"She reminded me of my mother," said Captain Silvester, with gentlemanly ease. "The same lady-like ease and innate grace charms you in both; perhaps, too, something in the profiles of the two faces increased the illusion."

"You must not fall in love with Frances Gladstone, Captain Silvester," said Amelia, significantly.

"Why not, Miss Vinen?"

"Because you will be wasting your time and your trouble," answered Amelia, with a smile, leaving the couch.

"Is your sister so very impregnable?" asked Captain Silvester of Kate, fixing his fine eyes upon her beautiful countenance. "I scarcely should have thought she was so great a stoic, from the short interview I had with her this evening."

"Frances is everything that a sister should be," said Kate, fondly.

"An admirable answer," was the gentlemanly reply, "but to return to yourself: I hope you do not suffer much pain, dear Miss Gladstone?" His tone was earnest as he spoke.

"Very little, indeed, thank you."

"It has not marred the brilliancy of your complexion, at any rate," said her companion, looking admiringly into her face, "nor your spirits either, I trust."

Kate was far from being as happy as she seemed, for William Wilding's absence had

really alarmed her very much; it was so contrary to his usual practice to absent himself from any company he had promised to join where he knew she was to be one of the guests; and she could not help admitting she had acted a very foolish part in running away from him as she had done. She had evidently estranged him from her, for the present at any rate, and her reflections were neither agreeable nor satisfactory.

"Did you know, Kate, that Mr. Wilding would not be here to-night?" asked Amelia Vinen, in a whisper, during the temporary absence of Captain Silvester, who had been enticed on some plea or other into the adjoining room.

"No; I was not aware he would not join your party," replied Kate, with a smile that should have been a sigh, "though I scarcely expected he would come."

Amelia was not deficient in penetration, and had her suspicions of what had occurred.

"The misunderstanding will blow over in a

day or two," she thought. "I shouldn't be in the least surprised to see them kissing and making it up to-morrow, at the furthest; but if Captain Silvester's passing admiration should become permanent there will be mischief in store for all."

Early hours were always observed at the Rectory, and soon after ten o'clock the guests took their departure.

"I believe Mrs. Silvester intends doing herself the honour of calling upon you to-morrow, Mrs. Vinen," said the Captain, aloud, as he took leave of his hostess. "My father and she are going into Devonshire in a day or two to pay a very long visit."

"I shall be happy to see Mrs. Silvester," was the cordial rejoinder of Mrs. Vinen.

In passing Kate's couch he lingered, and, as he held out his hand, said, in a hesitating manner and subdued tones—

"May I come with my mother to enquire after your health?" accompanying the words with one of his most fascinating smiles.

"I am sure Mrs. Vinen will be pleased to see you, Captain Silvester," was Kate's trembling reply, as he pressed her hand and bowed himself out with the rest of the guests.

Poor Kate! But little sleep was she able to obtain during the hours of that, to her, wearying night. As she lay restlessly on her pillow she was one moment haunted by Captain Silvester's deep, earnest tones, repeating the words he had spoken during that eventful evening; whilst the next, William Wilding, pale and threatening, stood beside her, muttering, "Fair and false! fair and false! I will never see you again!"

At length the faint streaks of the grey morn came through her window. With the first glimpse of morning, Kate arose from her bed and stood watching the heavens gradually brightening, until there was light enough for her to see to write a letter to William Wilding—a sadly blurred epistle of not more than four lines, for her tears had fallen plentifully

on the paper as she wrote. The whole subject might have been condensed into two words, "Forgive me!" This she hastily folded—there were no envelopes in those days—sealed it hurriedly, and thrust it under her pillow, and getting into bed again, fell, after a time, into an uneasy sleep.

"You lazy girl," cried Amelia, in Kate's ear, giving her a hearty shake as she spoke. "You really shall slumber no longer. You will sleep your senses away."

"Is it so late?" asked Kate, aroused from her bewildering dream, and lifting her flushed face from the pillow. "I didn't think I had slept an hour."

"That may be correct, and depends upon the time you fell asleep," rejoined Amelia, laughing. "If it was nine when you sunk into forgetfulness, you have just slept an hour."

"It surely cannot be ten o'clock," cried Kate, taking her watch from under her pillow dragging with it the letter she had so

recently written, and then as she saw that it was so late, she continued—

“Dear Amelia ! how could you allow me to sleep till this time of day.”

“Mamma looks upon you in the light of an invalid, and would not permit you to be disturbed,” laughed Amelia, dancing about the room, until discovering Kate’s letter, which had fallen upon the floor, she picked it up, and placed it on the dressing-table, saying, “Shall I assist you to dress ?”

“Pray do, Amelia. Is breakfast over ?”

“Hours ago ; papa has gone off somewhere, and mamma is busily at work with the house-keeper checking off the weekly bills. Poor I am the only drone in the hive, and I am coolly permitted to be idle, because I am ordered to keep my hands clean, and am, as you see, dressed in my best frock, to be in readiness to receive the threatened visit from that dreadful Mrs. Silvester. By the bye, my dear Kate, I must really congratulate you on the conquest you made last night, and put

William Wilding on his guard the moment I see him."

"Oh! Amelia, don't!"

"Oh! Amelia, do!" echoed Miss Vinen, imitating Kate's beseeching tones. "Do you know, child, that Captain Silvester is deeply and hopelessly in love with you?"

"No, Amelia, he is not—" began Kate.

"Yes, Amelia, he is," persisted her companion, again imitating her voice, "and, knowing that when once the grand passion seizes him, he permits nothing to turn him aside, and seeing that he is sufficiently handsome to prove a formidable rival to Mr. Wilding, I shall consider it my bounden duty to make the latter properly jealous and unhappy. I shall invent one or two walks in the shrubbery by moonlight, or, if the moon will not be polite enough to shine just now, a walk in the afternoon will answer the purpose. The Captain shall make you an offer, and—"

"William won't believe such nonsense, Amelia," exclaimed Kate, not at all relishing

Amelia's raillery, "so pray don't rack your brains to invent such rhodomontades!"

"Gracious goodness! what a word!" exclaimed Amelia, who took pleasure in teasing Kate much more than she did her sister Frances, the latter being more than a match for her, "and what, pray, does your ladyship intend wearing to-day? By the bye, if you marry Captain Silvester, you may one day be 'my lady' in reality."

"How will that come to pass?" asked Kate, with great apparent indifference, and beginning her toilette.

"Mr. Silvester's uncle, old Sir James Silvester, has only two brothers, both, like himself, old bachelors. Just imagine yourself Lady Silvester, Kate! Why the very thought is enough to take away one's breath!"

"It is, indeed," replied Kate, who scarcely heard what her companion had been saying. "What will Mrs. Vinen say to me for being so lazy?"

"Be thankful that your accident makes you

for the time a privileged person. I will wager you a new pair of gloves you never dressed yourself with half so much expedition in your life."

"I don't think I ever did, Amelia," said Kate, who was beginning to recover her usual spirits, thanks to the letter she had written to William Wilding, and which she felt confident would bring him to her feet before the day was over. "When I am Lady Silvester I will engage you as my maid," and she laughed merrily.

"Now, then, just lean upon me, and fancy that I am Captain Silvester, and let us see if we can manage the descent of the stairs, silly girl," said Amelia, whose gaiety was quite unusual with her. "There, be very cautious—that was a very clever step! I don't think, after all, it will be necessary to summon William Wilding to carry you."

Kate's breakfast was quite ready for her in the breakfast-room, which was deserted, Mrs. Vinen being either in the garden or the village,

for the good lady's activity led her abroad hours before most people of her station were out of bed ; so the two girls drew the small table close to the fire and began to chat away about a thousand and one things that young girls alone find to talk over—dress, novels, lovers, and balls.

They were in the full flow of all this chatter and mirth, when the door opened, and Mrs. Vinen entered. Behind her, to the rather frightened look of Kate, appeared a stately personage who, from the eyes and delicately-shaped mouth, so like those of Captain Silvester, she felt assured must be his mother.

Amelia gave one most expressive glance at Kate, and then went forward to welcome the lady, with quite as much stately ease, and with a little more warmth, than that grand lady advanced to greet her.

"You must excuse our want of ceremony, my dear madam," said Mrs. Vinen, whose charming frankness shone the brighter by contrast with the *hauteur* of her guest.

"Allow me to present my dear young friend, Miss Kate Gladstone."

"The young lady, I believe, whom an unpleasant, but I trust trifling accident, introduced to my son's notice," said Mrs. Silvester, in a musical voice, as she extended a delicately gloved hand. "I was requested to apologise to Miss Gladstone for the Captain's not calling to enquire after her health this morning. He was obliged to accompany his father to Bradford."

"I hope Captain Silvester is well," stammered Kate, who was quite flurried by such coldly dignified sentences.

"He is quite well," said Mrs. Silvester, who had been examining the beautiful face before her with critical *nonchalance*, and who undoubtedly determined that her son should be subjected to its fascination as seldom as possible; then turning to Mrs. Vinen said—"Dear Mrs. Vinen, may I ask you to allow me to drive you to 'Sunnyside' an early day

next week? Mr. Silvester and I are going to Devonshire very soon, and I am very anxious to return Mrs. Coulson's visit before I leave."

"You may command me at any time, my dear madam," said Mrs. Vinen, who felt compelled gracefully to accept the offer, though not particularly anxious to visit "Sunnyside" in such company. "I hope you like 'The Rookery'?"

"Very much indeed. I believe," with a gracious bow to Kate, "that Miss Gladstone's brother is our landlord."

"Yes," said Kate.

"By-the-bye," said Mrs. Silvester, as if the thought had just struck her, "will you three ladies join a few friends who will dine with us next Tuesday. Of course I shall expect Dr. Vinen," she added, rising to take leave. "Shall we say Monday for our 'Sunnyside' jaunt, dear Mrs. Vinen?"

"Yes; I have no engagement for that day,

and shall be happy to accompany you in the drive," said Mrs. Vinen, "that is if it suits you."

"Perfectly," was the reply of Mrs. Silvester, whose face was now turned towards the light, so that Kate had a good opportunity of scanning her features, as she continued the conversation with her hostess. Kate was amazed at first, by the extraordinary likeness to her son, and, although her profile was somewhat different, it was quite evident that Mrs. Silvester had once been very handsome, though there was something about the mouth that induced Kate to think she could never have been loveable.

"On Monday morning I will call for you," were Mrs. Silvester's parting words, uttered in a musical voice; then, turning to the girls, she said, "I am sorry my little pony carriage will only hold two, or I should have been very happy to have had the company of my young friends."

"Amelia will most likely have some en-

gement to prevent her accompanying us," said Mrs. Vinen, following her visitor to the door, which, as she reached it, opened, and Captain Silvester very unexpectedly made his appearance.

Kate saw Mrs. Silvester's eyes flash fire in a moment, as without recognising her further than by a slight bow, her son advanced into the room, and shook hands with Mrs. Vinen, Amelia, and herself.

"I thought you were gone to Bradford this morning?" said his mother, in her stately manner.

"Friends called who prevented our going, madam." Then sitting down by Kate, he began to ask in his kindest way whether she was recovering, and if the pain in the ankle had prevented her sleeping during the night.

"You look ill enough to induce Miss Gladstone to put the latter question to you," said his mother, noticing how very pale he looked.

Her son parried the hint with some light

badinage, which did not deceive Mrs. Silvester in the least. He had, indeed, scarcely slept at all, so deep had been the impression which Kate's beauty made upon him.

"I will accompany you home, mother," he said, rising after a few minutes. "I ordered John to drive your carriage round to the church gates, as my father thought he should not be disengaged for some hours."

"What a dreadful mother-in-law that woman would be," said Amelia, with a sigh of relief, when the two girls were again left to themselves. "Did you observe, Kate, how fierce she looked when her son appeared?"

"I did, Amelia; but I don't think he cares much for her fierceness," replied Kate. "I wish your servant would step down to the post office for me."

Amelia rang the bell, and gave Kate's letter to the man in silence. She perfectly understood the blush that overspread her friend's countenance at the moment, but she took no notice of it, further than to compliment her

on the good effect the accident had had upon her appearance, declaring, with a significant smile, that her complexion was superb.

Kate smiled and blushed more than ever. Confident that her letter would bring William Wilding to her side that evening, she felt quite happy, and made many good resolutions; she would never quarrel with him again, but would always, in future, be very affectionate and submissive. She loved him fondly and truly, and did not care one iota about Captain Silvester, although he was both handsome and kind.

CHAPTER IV.

BETWEEN Frances Gladstone and her sister Kate there was one great difference which should be noticed, as in a great measure it explains the cause of an event to be related hereafter. Frances's actions were invariably regulated by principle, Kate's, too often, were only guided by the impulse of the moment. Her sweet temper had hitherto protected her suffering from the misery that might otherwise have been entailed upon her, but the greatest amiability of temper cannot always protect us from the ill effects of an absence of rectitude in our words and deeds.

Mr. Wilding came not to the Rectory that evening, although Kate had made her resolve

as to the course she would take, with the greatest certainty that he would fly to her the moment he received her letter. After a time she felt both uneasy and angry; one moment she was confident he must be absent from home, and therefore could not have received it; the next she accused him of being sulky and unforgiving, and became excessively indignant at the unfeeling way in which he was treating her.

Dr. Vinen, who was an admirable reader, and frequently read aloud, came from his study to the drawing-room, carrying a new book in his hand, with the intention of amusing the ladies.

“What is the matter, silly one?” he asked, as he caught a glimpse of Kate’s troubled countenance. “I hope that foot of yours is not painful again.”

Kate wished sincerely that it was nothing more, but she durst not trust herself to utter an answer, and Dr. Vinen went on, addressing his wife—

"I think, my love, we shall have no callers this evening to interrupt us, so I have brought Byron's new poem to read to you."

"Thank you, my dear, we will be quiet and attentive," said Mrs. Vinen, "for in all probability this will be the last evening for some time that we shall be disengaged, as Elizabeth and her husband come to-morrow, bringing all the children with them."

Elizabeth, or more properly speaking Mrs. Morgan, was Dr. Vinen's eldest daughter.

"Then we must get through the poem this evening, my dear; those children play vengeance with our quiet evenings when they are here. Now, young ladies, attention, I beg of you," and the Doctor began.

For a short time Kate was charmed out of her own dreamy forebodings by the exquisite beauty of the poem, and the taste and impressive manner the reader displayed in interpreting the inspirations of the bard. After a time, however, she began to feel weary, and to busy herself with her own sad thoughts, con-

fusing Selim and Wilding together after the most ingenious fashion, until her head ached with the pain of trying to listen to her host instead of attending to that other voice within her which would make itself heard, strive as she would to drown it. She was startled at the close of the second canto by Amelia stealing her hand into hers and whispering an enquiry why she looked so very miserable.

Kate trembled like a guilty thing, and glanced rapidly over to the Rector and Mrs. Vinen. Fortunately both were absorbed in the story, and she ventured to look at Amelia.

"What's the matter, Kate?" again questioned the latter.

Kate shook her head and smiled. Amelia could not interpret the smile, so she went on—

"Are you fretting because William Wilding has not come to see you?" she spoke in the same subdued tones. "If I were you, Kate, I'd discard the sulky bear, and take poor Captain Silvester into favour."

"Hush, Amelia, or the Rector will hear you," whispered Kate, who forgot that the burly divine was rather deaf. "I was not thinking of William at all."

"That's a white fib, I'll take my oath," retorted Amelia, who didn't care much for Byron, but who thought Tom Moore divine. "Come and sit here, and tell me all about this silly quarrel between you and poor William. Now, don't start and turn ashy pale and look at papa and mamma, as if they cared to know what we are talking about, which they don't; tell me truly, Kate, have you quarrelled with Mr. Wilding?"

"Oh! nothing more than a slight misunderstanding yesterday," replied Kate, coolly, "I've no doubt it's all right by this time."

"I am afraid it is not, or he would have been here," said her clearer headed confidante, "for that letter, I imagine, you sent to the post to-day was for William Wilding."

"Yes."

"I suppose," thought Amelia, "it's no use telling her she has acted very unwisely in writing, for the mischief is done and can't be undone. I'm afraid poor Kate is jilted."

Amelia's thoughts had travelled with lightning speed a long distance in an incredibly short time, judging by the question she put the next moment to her companion.

"Has your sister Frances heard from Alfred lately?"

"I believe so; I think she had a letter about ten days ago; but you know I never read those letters," said Kate, wondering what Alfred Vinen had to do with her quarrel.

"Thank heaven papa has got to the end of his book," said Amelia, in a sprightly tone; "I hope he won't talk much about the story, or we shall be found out, Kate."

"I shall pretend to be asleep," said Kate, yawning.

"That would be a worse offence than the other," replied Amelia, laughing, "we must let all the talk be between mamma and him-

self. Heaven never intended me for a critic, I am certain."

"I don't think women ever are good critics," said Kate.

"Why?" asked her companion.

"Because, my brother says, they allow the heart to decide, and not the head."

"And, in my opinion, the truest test, after all, Kate," said Amelia, with considerable warmth. "If the heart were always permitted to act, in the daily occurrences of life, as freely as we now suffer its less noble but more crafty rival, believe me there would be less knavery and more loyalty and truth; there might be occasions when the wisdom and decision of the heart might be doubtful, but depend on it they would be but few in comparison with the sorrows and grief, the bitter tears and breaking hearts that would be saved from suffering and sorrow. We talk about our hearts as if they were no part of us, rather than, by following their dictates, secure our own happiness and peace."

"A beautiful homily," said Kate, rather amazed at the turn the conversation was taking.

"You know the gift runs in the family," laughed Amelia. "I should have made an excellent bishop. I wish I had been a man."

"Why?"

"Oh! I can't enumerate all the reasons, they are so numerous."

"Give me some of them."

"Well, I like to lead in everything, and if a woman presumes to lead her husband she gets a bad character. The head of the family must always guide the helm, be he ever such a simpleton. I tell you what, Kate," she added, half aloud, "we women are sadly imposed upon."

"Highty-tity! Amelia," exclaimed her father, who had heard a word or two of his daughter's diatribes. "What treason are you fulminating, pray?"

"Nothing papa," was the laughing answer. "Kate and I have only been describing the

wrongs of women, whilst you and mamma have been drinking sherbet with Madam Zuleika."

"You have not heard one word of what I have been reading, I suppose?" said the Rector.

"Not much, I must confess, sir," was the smiling reply.

"I should like to know," said Dr. Vinen, with a little curiosity visible in his countenance, "I should like to know, my dear, your notions on what you call 'The wrongs of women.'"

"Lend me your pulpit any week-day in the evening, sir, and I will enlighten you and the whole of your parishioners on the subject," said his daughter, good humouredly; "the subject is far too wide in its bearing to commence just at bed time."

"But we need not go to bed at present; it's only just nine o'clock," said the Rector, looking at his watch.

"It ought to be eleven at least, seeing how

sleepy I feel," said Amelia, with a frightful yawn. "I really cannot begin to-night, sir."

"Well, then, ring the bell for the supper-tray; and whilst you are discussing the fruit and bread I will have another look at the 'Bride of Abydos.' "

Dr. Vinen knew how to draw his daughter out, and without saying another word he began turning over the pages of his book. After a time he exclaimed—

"Beautiful!"

"What is beautiful?" asked Amelia.

"The portion of the 'Bride' I have just read. Listen."

And he read a few stanzas.

"Beautiful, indeed!" exclaimed Amelia, with enthusiasm.

"It is indeed beautiful, my dear girl," said the Rector, sailing quietly round to his point. "I wish, my love, you had heard the whole poem."

"I am sorry I did not, papa; but I will read it," she said, frankly.

"Do you think, Amelia, I am fanciful in saying it is owing to the different way in which women are treated in Turkey and England that the two nations fill such different positions in the scale of the civilised world?"

"I will follow the Irish way of answering your question by asking another. Do you think woman exercises so powerful an influence on mankind?"

"I do. From the cradle to the grave she sheds the holy influence of her being upon her sterner and stronger helpmeet. What do you say, my love?" he asked, addressing Mrs. Vinen.

"I quite appreciate your views," said his wife, "and in no country or climate can this be said so truly as it can of England."

"An Englishman," rejoined the Rector, "treats his wife as if she were his friend; a Frenchman as if she were a pretty doll, invented to amuse an idle hour. I think, were I a woman, I would almost prefer being in a Turkish Harem to the latter. Yet, silly

creatures that you are, you occasionally rebel against your good fortune. Can you not say a word or two upon the subject, Kate?"

"Nothing to edify, sir, I am afraid. I have no wish to change either my climate or my creed."

"You probably think Wilding will prove a pleasant taskmaster," said the Rector, significantly.

He perceived tears coming into her eyes, and he paused. He was a tender-hearted man, but being entirely ignorant of the quarrel that had taken place, and Kate's engagement being generally known, he said—

"I hope, my dear, you will give me the pleasure of assisting to eat your wedding-breakfast before long."

Mrs. Vinen made a sign to her husband across the table, whilst Kate hung down her head and tried to keep herself from crying.

"Papa," said Amelia, coming to her friend's rescue, "do you know that Elizabeth and all her brats are coming to us to-morrow?"

"I did hear something of it, Amelia," said her father, "and I suppose they will bring Charles with them, too?"

"Oh! Charles, of course, will come with the rest. I wish Alfred had been at home."

"You must wait patiently. Why, where in the name of fortune is Kate?" he exclaimed, as he missed her from her seat.

"Kate, I suppose, has tired of our Turkish discussion, and has stolen away to bed," said Amelia, lighting her candle. "Good-night, papa."

She kissed him as fondly as she had done from her earliest childhood, and the same affectionate devotion was given to the mother.

Kate, in the meantime, had stolen away to her bed-room in the dark, and, sitting down, had burst into a violent fit of crying, which she tried hard to quell. William Wilding had deserted her for ever, she felt certain. If he had not why did he not answer her letter in person and forgive her. It never occurred to her that he might not have received it, or

that he might be too ill to come, yet neither were unlikely to have occurred. Her grief spent itself at last, and when Amelia came into her room before going into her own, she found Kate with the tears still upon her cheeks, fast asleep in bed.

Kate was quite in high spirits at the breakfast table the next morning, and talked incessantly, much more than was her wont ; though Amelia could plainly perceive there was something forced and unnatural in her gaiety. Kate contrived not to be left alone with her young friend even for five minutes, so Amelia had little opportunity for any explanations, and as soon as breakfast was over, she went upstairs to see that everything was in order for the reception of her sister and her children, who were certain to be at the Rectory during the day.

Kate's head ached fearfully, and she put on her bonnet with the intention of walking round the garden to get a breath of fresh air and the quiet she so anxiously desired. As she passed

the housekeeper's room, she heard the footman say—

“I wonder what's in the wind, that Mr. William Wilding has gone off in such a tremendous hurry. He went south yesterday morning, and his man has orders to follow him to-day; there's something queer astir, ma'am.”

“Don't talk stuff,” said the housekeeper, as Kate stole away. “He'll be back just as quickly, depend on it.”

Kate had no wish to hear more, she walked through the grounds and up the village street, apparently perfectly unconscious of everything around her. She shed no tears, she uttered no cry, but there was something far more terrible than either tears or groans within her heart. She went on until she came to the wood; a stile separated it from a pasture, where, as a child, she had gathered daisies and buttercups. Upon this stile she sat down, and, shading her face with her parasol from the glare of the sun,

began to recall the happy days of childhood, ere love had entered her heart and exercised such powerful dominion over it.

So completely absorbed was she in her thoughts, that she did not hear footsteps approaching the stile. An odd sort of struggle was going on in her heart. She could not forsake Wilding, and yet it was cruel of him to desert her without a word of explanation.

At last she heard someone address her, and with a start she jumped from the stile, and beheld Captain Silvester standing behind her.

CHAPTER V.

“Good morning, Miss Gladstone,” said Captain Silvester. “Have you been sitting here long?”

“I don’t exactly know how long,” replied Kate, vexed and a little angry at the meeting, but she did not permit him to see her annoyance.

“This fine morning tempted you to walk, I suppose?”

“Yes,” she replied, looking up with a beautiful blush overspreading her countenance. “I had a violent headache, and came out in the hope that the fresh morning air would drive it away.”

Captain Silvester smiled, jumped over the stile, and stood beside her.

“My mother has done nothing but rave about you, since she met you at Dr. Vinen’s,” he said. “You have made a great impression upon her, and that I can assure you is what very few people do, therefore it is something to boast of, Miss Kate.”

Kate looked flattered, as she said—

“I fancied Mrs. Silvester did not much like me.”

“Then you were very much mistaken,” said her companion, warmly; “she talked so much about you, that my father is quite anxious for an introduction, solely from my mother’s description; and you know, or can know if you choose, that Mrs. Silvester never flatters any one.”

“So I should imagine, judging by her manner,” was Kate’s rejoinder.

“My mother is an excessively proud woman,” said the Captain, bluntly, “and is ambitious enough to wish me to make, what

she calls, a high match. She would like me to marry Lady Helena Fisk, I believe," and he laughed good naturedly.

Kate knew Lady Helena only by report, and that report proclaimed her to be hump-backed and with a countenance yellow as a guinea, neither of which were beautiful in Captain Silvester's eyes.

"Do you think, Miss Gladstone, any man could be happy with such a poor, deformed, sickly thing as Lady Helena?"

"I have never seen her, so am quite unable to pass an opinion upon the subject," was the reply.

"She's the very incarnation of ugliness, and quite as spiteful as she is ugly," he said, passionately. "I hope you are not walking too far with your scarcely healed sprain."

"Thank you, no; I am quite recovered from that accident." They walked on till arriving at a part of the path which was very precipitous and rather rugged, Kate turned her face homeward, continuing to sustain her

part in the conversation with a vivacity and sprightliness that made her look still more lovely in the eyes of her companion. In fact, he became quite entranced, and felt he was hopelessly in love.

He had, however, most admirable control over himself, exhibiting his admiration only by a deeper deference and respect. A finished gentleman, he never transgressed the bounds of politeness, and appeared quite calm and self-possessed, in spite of the tremendous storm raging in his breast.

The very first minute he saw Kate his senses were captivated. She was the living likeness of the ideal being he had pictured and cherished in his heart, and the witchery of her manner in the two or three interviews they had did the rest.

"I believe there is going to be a houseful of company at the Rectory for the next month," he said, as they walked along.

"Yes; Mrs. Morgan and her children are coming to-day, I understand," said Kate.

"Mrs. Vinen always gathers her family about her at this season."

"It must be a great nuisance having such a lot of children about one all day," was the Captain's observation. "I am always dreadfully stupid when in the presence of the little, mischievous things, for I know not what to say or how to amuse them. I never had either a brother or a sister, and that perhaps accounts for it."

"But Mrs. Morgan's children are rather acquisitions than otherwise," remarked Kate. "I think all healthy, well-managed children must be so."

He pictured her with two or three of the little Morgans grouped around her ; one in her lap and one or two at her feet, and suddenly began to feel a deep interest in children.

"Do you think," he asked, "that I might venture to come up to the Rectory of an evening whilst the Morgans are there?"

"Certainly ; I am sure it will give Mrs.

Vinen and the Doctor pleasure to see you at any time."

"Will Miss Kate Gladstone be equally pleased to accord me a welcome?" he asked, without looking up.

Kate again felt vexed. She was quite certain he was aware of her engagement to William Wilding; and she thought he was scarcely justified in presuming so far upon their few chance meetings during the last day or two.

There was a pause of some length ere Kate ventured to answer, for she was at a loss how to make him understand her meaning decisively, and yet avoid every appearance of rudeness.

Captain Silvester discovered the error he had committed instantly.

He lifted his eyes from the ground, and his gaze, to all appearance honest yet sad, met Kate's without flinching.

"I fear, Miss Gladstone," he said, in his softest and most winning tones, "I have

offended you, but I hope you will be lenient, for I am peculiarly an object for pity, and, I trust forgiveness, to a lady. I have no kind sister to tell me when I am doing wrong, in my associations with her sex."

Kate was appeased in a moment, for the offence was not a very grievous one after all. The captain saw at a glance that he was forgiven, and with his accustomed good taste and tact took no further notice of the matter, but diverging into a new topic, soon made her forget the circumstance altogether.

At the end of the lane that led to "The Rookery" he stopped, and held out his hand, saying with a smile, that he would not venture to escort her back to the Rectory.

"Does Mr. Morgan accompany his family?" he asked abruptly, turning back.

"No, I believe not," she replied. "I understand he will not be here till the end of the week."

Whistling to his dog, Captain Silvester bowed, and again saying good morning, went

towards "The Rookery," whilst Kate walked back to the Rectory, comparing his deferential manner with that of William Wilding's, which was certainly a contrast.

Amelia had been exceedingly busy, and had not noticed Kate's absence of upwards of two hours, and Kate was glad to retreat from the bed-room, the renovation of which her friend was superintending, to the breakfast parlour, the quiet of which was particularly soothing in her present frame of mind.

It was lucky the Morgans came that afternoon just before dinner was announced, for it took off Amelia's attention from Kate altogether, and allowed the latter to steal away for five minutes now and then when she felt nervous and excited, as, from time to time she thought over her position.

Mrs. Morgan sat opposite Kate at dinner that day. She was a calm, yet exquisitely beautiful woman, just what her mother must have been when about the same age ; fair and regal looking, with soft grey eyes and that

freshness of complexion which none but Englishwomen can boast of possessing. She was not at all like Amelia in appearance, although a similarity of disposition made it easy to recognize the sisterly connection between them.

Amelia had already hinted to her sister there was some temporary misunderstanding between Kate and William Wilding, so the new comer made no allusion to that subject. She enquired very affectionately after Frances and Sophia, the latter having been one of her most esteemed friends previously to her marriage.

“Suppose we make up a small party for to-morrow evening,” said Amelia to her sister, as they sat chatting over the dessert. “Kate and I will walk over to Bradford to ask Mr. Gladstone and Frances, you can drive with mamma to invite any pleasant people within visiting distance. I will post a note to Agatha Coulson this evening ; she will get it early enough in the morning to allow of her

getting here, and Mrs. Coulson, too, if she chooses to come."

"Agatha Coulson is still unmarried then?" said Mrs. Morgan.

"Oh, yes. I tease her sometimes by telling her that I believe she has made up her mind to remain single in preference to marrying that haughty, frigid lover of hers, and it will, I think, prove the old adage, 'that many a true word is spoken in jest.'"

"I hope Miss Coulson won't dally much longer with her admirer."

"Admirer!" cried Amelia. "Admirer of her wealth, you mean."

"Perhaps so," continued the Rector, quietly peeling his walnuts. "At any rate, I hope Agatha will be married soon."

"Why, papa?"

"Because if she does not it may be the means of losing her a very pretty property—that's all."

"I am afraid none of us comprehend your meaning, my love," said Mrs. Vinen, who

understood her husband's humour, and knew that he liked to have any little secret forced from him, in preference to retailing it of his own free will.

"You are aware that the 'Sunnyside' property came to Agatha Coulson by a rather strange accident," continued the Rector. "The last owner, Mr. Gray, was rather an eccentric man, but by no means a fool, and read other people's characters—as the event I am going to tell you will prove—quite as keenly as any one.

"Gray had no near relatives, with the exception of a nephew, a proud, haughty young man, who, being his uncle's acknowledged heir, took a great deal more upon himself than he ought to have done. I suspect old Gray had obtained intelligence of this, for there are always plenty of people ready to bring ill tales of you; but whether the case or not, the old man all of a sudden became ill, and the nephew immediately left his pleasures in London to be ready to slip

into his uncle's shoes as soon as he was past wearing them. Mr. Gray had two very bad fits, which made him, to all appearance, quite imbecile, and then his haughty nephew began to show himself in his true colours.

"He might have done this with impunity, had he not desecrated the chamber of death with his thoughtless, heartless selfishness; but there he began to abuse, in a very unwarrantable manner, the faithful old housekeeper of his uncle, in a strain that showed what had been his real motives for the subserviency he had shewn towards his uncle, and when the poor woman refused to comply with his orders, finished by telling her that he was master of 'Sunnyside,' as the old thing that was lying in the bed would never more raise hand or foot in that house."

"Was the poor old man conscious of what was going on all this time?" asked Amelia.

"You shall hear. The heir, I suppose, my dear, went out of the room, and to the consternation and surprise of the housekeeper,

Mr. Gray rose in his bed, pale and ghastly, and, weak as he was, told her to send a man on horseback for his attorney to come to him instantly. The lawyer came, Mr. Gray made a fresh will, disinherited his nephew, and left his estate to Agatha Coulson, a child he had never seen, but who was the daughter of his first cousin."

"Is that all, papa?" asked Amelia, quiscally.

"No, it is not all, Miss Inquisitive. I am afraid old Gray was jealous that even she would enjoy it too much if he did not put in some strange clause, and so he tacked one on to the bequest."

"What was that, sir?"

"Why, neither more nor less than if she did not marry, with her guardians' consent, before she attained the age of twenty-one, the estate should be given to one of the London hospitals, and that she should merely receive an annuity of five hundred pounds out of it."

"How old is Agatha now, sir?" asked Mrs. Morgan.

"A month, I think, over twenty," replied the Rector.

"So much as that!" said Amelia.

"Yes," replied her father, gravely, "things are becoming very critical with Agatha."

"I wish some nice manly fellow would fall in love with her," said his elder daughter, warmly.

"Anyone but that proud, cold man her mother seems determined she shall have," echoed Mrs. Vinen.

"He is the gentleman whose conduct in the chamber of death was so signally punished," said the Rector, in a low voice.

"Depend on it, sir," said Amelia, "the hospital will get the estate, for I am quite confident Agatha will never unite herself to that man; she hates the very sight of him."

"It would be better for her to lose the estate altogether," said Mrs. Morgan; "for my part, I would rather be poor and free than

rich and miserable. Has Agatha no other admirers?"

Had Frances Gladstone been there she would have blushed scarlet at the question, for she more than guessed her brother William's partiality for Miss Coulson. Kate, however, had less penetration, and the question did not make her feel uncomfortable. Some one answered in the negative, and then some of the little Morgans made themselves heard by preferring a request that Aunt Amelia would give them some more fruit, and the conversation turned into another channel.

As was agreed upon, Amelia and Kate walked into Bradford the next morning to invite William Gladstone and his sister Frances for that evening. Notes had been written and despatched to Agatha Coulson and one or two others who lived at too great a distance to enable Mrs. Vinen to call in the carriage to give a personal invitation.

On their way to Bradford Kate and

Amelia met William and Mr. Simpkin, both, apparently, judging by their eager, yet grave faces and hurried walk, engaged in a very serious conversation. William looked somewhat morose, Kate thought, very unlike himself. His strange looks quite unnerved her, and, after she had wished the two gentlemen good morning, she was quite unhappy until she reached home, and became assured by Frances's quiet, cheerful manner that there was nothing the matter.

"When do you intend coming home again, Kate?" asked Sophia.

"Whenever you wish," said Kate, who, if the truth must be told, was getting anxious for a little quiet.

"I suppose you have taken up all William Wilding's time, as he never calls here now," continued Miss Gladstone. "I don't think he has been once since you left."

"He was here the night before last," said Frances, in a voice that, to Kate's guilty ears, sounded awfully solemn in the silence that

followed Sophia's speech. "William saw him down stairs, but he did not stay more than a few minutes, and then went away."

"That is rather odd, Frances," said Sophia, who seemed perversely determined to continue the subject as long as she could. "And did William not tell you anything that passed between them during the interview?"

"You know he never does, my dear," said the youngest sister.

This remark of Frances' had the desired effect, the subject was dropped, and Kate felt very thankful, though the uncertainty in which it left her made the poor girl ten times more miserable than before. There could be but little doubt that William Wilding had come to the painful determination to forget her, and that in all probability he had called late at night upon her brother to make his resolution known to him.

Wilding was honourable, even to the last, and would not do anything, even in his passionate despair, which would lay him open at

any future time to the charge of having done, through caprice and whim, what had been thoroughly and honestly determined upon from the first.

Kate could not tell after this whether there was much or little said, nor could she recollect afterwards, when trying to do so, one single topic of conversation that was broached after she had been told that William Wilding had been closeted with her brother.

"I have had a letter from a friend whose name I dare say your woman's wit can lead you to guess, Kate," whispered Frances, as they all went together downstairs. "If you will promise not to show it to any one I will lend it to you."

And Kate readily promising, Frances placed the letter in her hands.

"It is from William Wilding," was Kate's idea, as she hid it in her bosom.

CHAPTER VI.

KATE GLADSTONE, on her way back to the Rectory, astonished Amelia Vinen exceedingly, for she had not been accustomed of late to see her young friend in such exuberant spirits, and was, consequently, rather puzzled to account for it in any rational way.

“What has happened, Kate?” she asked, in a rather abrupt manner, as she and her companion stopped in a spot pleasantly shaded from the sun by a splendid elm tree. “Have you heard anything from the runaway Wilding?”

“Frances has had a letter from him,” said her companion.

“Frances had a letter?”

"Yes."

"Has the wind shifted, then?" asked Amelia, shrugging her shoulders, with a quizzical expression of countenance.

"Not quite, Amelia," rejoined Kate; "the letter, I believe, was only sent to Frances that I might be sure to receive it."

"Oh! that's it."

"Yes."

"Have you got the letter?"

"Yes."

"Come, then, produce it."

"I must not show it to you."

"Why not?"

"Because Frances made me promise to show it to no one," said Kate, "but if you will turn your back so that you can't see the letter I will read it to you."

"Oh! I can easily manage that, and will shut my eyes too, if that will be more satisfactory," said Amelia, who acted up to the spirit of her speech in a moment. "Now for it, Kate."

And the two friends burst into a merry fit of laughter.

Kate, it must be confessed, felt somewhat nervous, and drawing the letter from her bosom, looked at the address for a moment before turning to the contents.

So ominous and death-like a silence followed that Amelia at last turned, only to behold her friend, no longer the laughing, happy, and beautiful girl she had looked upon a few moments before, with an expression of terrible despair stamped upon her marble features, staring wildly at the missive in her hand as if it was her own death warrant.

It was truly a lamentable revulsion of feeling, but Kate rose superior to it the next moment, nay, she even smiled, but it was a ghastly smile, as she again replaced the letter in her bosom, and whispered, with pallid lips—

“It is a letter from Captain Vinen to my sister. Had we not better walk on, Amelia?”

She started off with an uncertain step

as she spoke ; then Amelia saw her stagger and heard a sharp cry, and running forward, caught her as she fell.

At first Miss Vinen feared she was dead, so white and rigid were her features, and she almost fainted at the idea. Kate had gradually sunk upon the ground, and Amelia, in real terror, looked wildly about for means to recover her poor friend from her fainting fit.

There was no water within a quarter of a mile at the least, and she was almost incapable of action from her own alarm, when a deep sigh from Kate reassured her a little. Amelia could think of nothing wiser than to take off her own bonnet and fan Kate's face with it, but it is questionable whether this did her any good though she certainly appeared wonderfully revived by the operation, and in a few minutes raised herself upon her elbows.

"What is the matter, Amelia?" was her first question. "What makes you cry so?"

"Am I crying, Kate?" asked Amelia, who

Was almost unconscious tears were in her eyes. "Do you feel better?"

"I feel very sick. Did I faint?" she asked.

"To be sure you did; and if you don't mind you will faint again," said Amelia, wiping her eyes.

"I suppose it must be want of sleep that occasioned it," said Kate, in a mournful tone. "I have had nothing but broken rest for several nights past."

"Then you must try and act differently for the future, Kate. Do you think you can walk now?"

"Let me rest a short time, Amelia. Did you know your brother was attached to my sister Frances?"

"I guessed it long ago."

"Are you glad, Amelia?"

"Very; for I think they are formed to make each other happy. Their dispositions are very similar, and that I take it is the great secret of the happiness of the married

state. I have heard some people argue that a little antagonism is advisable in husbands and wives; but for what I know and what I have witnessed amongst those of my friends who are married, I should imagine those who advocate such a theory argue upon false principles."

Kate sighed deeply, and then said—

"I hope Frances will be as happy as I think she deserves to be."

"I hope so too, Kate. I am sure my brother will do his best to make her happy. I wish we all had that fine, calm spirit Frances seems to carry about with her wherever she goes."

Kate's eyes filled with tears, but this time they were tears of joy, for she loved her sister dearly.

"I think I can walk now, Amelia," she said in a few minutes, "if you will go slowly."

"Take my arm, my dear, and don't mind how heavily you lean upon it," said Amelia,

who was truly a very unselfish girl. "Now don't be afraid, you silly goose, you know I am very strong."

"It is indeed very fortunate for me that you are, for I confess I am very weak," said Kate, with a sad smile. "I hope, dear Amelia, you will not mention what has occurred to any one."

"No living soul shall ever hear of it from me—nor about the letter," she added, the next minute.

"Thank you," was the grateful answer.

"Come, here's a capital stroke of fortune," cried Amelia, as they reached the next field. "Here is a spring, and now you can get some water."

"I really feel quite revived at the very idea." Obtaining a large leaf, Amelia managed to throw a tolerable quantity over her friend's face.

"I should like a draught of the water," said Kate.

"Can you drink it from this leaf?" asked Amelia.

“ Oh, quite well.”

Amelia again filled the leaf and held it to Kate's mouth.

“ Are you satisfied ?” Amelia asked.

“ I should like one more draught, Amelia,” Kate said, imploringly.

“ You will make yourself ill again,” said Amelia, as she gave her more. “ Now let us trudge away sturdily. I don't mean to give you my arm this time.”

Kate took it for all that, but Amelia suspected it was not because she required it, and so they walked on together until they arrived at the Rectory, just as the dinner bell rang.

“ Now run for your life, and change your dress,” said Amelia, as they crossed the hall. “ I suppose you are quite strong again ?”

“ Yes, quite,” answered Kate, who had rallied wonderfully. “ I'll wager a pair of new gloves that I make my appearance first in the drawing-room.”

“ We shall see,” said Amelia, as she disappeared.

At dinner Kate's paleness was the only trace of her illness that Amelia could discover. Had she seen the brief five minutes of agony that overwhelmed the poor girl in the interval of their separation, she would not have envied the seeming calmness that now characterized her manner.

Amelia would have been still more surprised had she read a letter that Kate found lying upon her toilet table, when she entered the room; a letter which she should not have read, for it was from one who had cruelly wrecked her peace of mind with his blandishments, but which she did read, for the fragments were found lying in the grate after she had left the Rectory.

In that letter Captain Silvester avowed his passion for her.

It was truly a trying position for Kate to be placed in.

On one hand William Wilding had deserted her, for what seemed in her eyes no very grave crime, and that without giving her an oppor-

tunity for explanation. On the other Captain Silvester offered her rank, wealth, and station, if she would become his for ever.

There was, too, one thing she feared above all others—the reproaches of her brother, who had from childhood awed her by his methodical, and, worse still, by his rather sarcastic manner. She was sure there would be a storm the first time they met alone, and the dread of such an occurrence quite unnerved her.

When William and Frances were announced, she was sitting, calm, and, to all appearance, self-possessed, but, as Frances thought, rather pale. Her brother looked quickly round the room for a moment for Agatha Coulson, whom he expected to see, but she had not yet arrived; and he began shaking hands right and left, whispering a joke here and a compliment there, as opportunity occurred, until he reached the couch where Mrs. Morgan and Kate were sitting.

Of course he had to speak to Mrs. Morgan first, for they were very old friends, and she

was one of those women you cannot neglect, no matter how many years have passed since you last met. Kate thought he lingered longer beside the good lady than there was any necessity for; but at last he found time to say—

“I don’t think Braidsworth has agreed with you, Kate—you look so very pale.”

A kind look would have overcome her, but it was not a kind look with which William accompanied the words.

“I have not been very well to-day, William,” said Kate, in a low tone.

He turned away without saying another word, and his poor sister’s heart grieved at his fancied indifference.

“Do you not think my brother very much altered by his adverse fortunes, my dear Mrs. Morgan?” Kate asked her companion, as she saw his proud head raised high above the group of gentlemen to whom he was talking.

“Yes, Kate, I think he is. He appears somewhat colder or prouder—I can scarcely

decide which ; but he is not so much changed as I expected to see him. The trial he has had to go through was severe enough to make any man look dark and proud for years after."

"And my sister Frances—how do you think she is looking?"

"Oh! there is little alteration in her ; if any, I should say she is improved in appearance."

Frances really looked charming as she sat between Mrs. Vinen and the Rector—both of whom loved her as fondly as they did their own children—with her head thrown a little on one side, a warm flush upon her cheeks, her eyes sparkling with pleasure, and her mouth parted so as to display the pearly teeth within ; listening rather than talking, for she rarely said much, unless she felt she was better informed than her companions on the subject under discussion, and there was not much chance of that with her present associates.

William Gladstone watched the door with the same vigilance that a cat would lay wait

for a mouse, although he pretended to be listening to a drowsy discussion as to what would probably be the effect upon the manufacturing districts, now the war had ceased. No other guests were expected.

The next moment he heard Mrs. Morgan wondering why the Coulsons had not arrived ; so he still solaced himself by the belief that they would come, until he heard the Rector's hall clock strike nine, and then he gave them up for the night.

He determined to ride over to "Sunnyside" the next evening, and enquire after their health ; one or both might be ill, or if they were quite well, the fact of their not being at the Rectory when they were expected would be a sufficient excuse for his going.

It happened very unfortunately that, apparently by accident, he took a seat beside his sister Kate, when no one was near them. He looked exceedingly stern, and his under lip quivered slightly, as it always did when he was keeping a restraint upon himself.

Kate's heart beat so violently that it could almost be heard during the total silence which reigned for a couple of minutes, during which neither of them spoke.

"Do you know where William Wilding is, Kate?" he at length asked, with more calmness than he himself thought possible.

"I do not, brother."

"I suppose you are equally ignorant of the cause of his leaving home," he continued, slowly.

"I scarcely do know. Perhaps, William, you are aware that—that—"

"That what, Kate?" he demanded.

Kate began to feel a reckless kind of courage, which nerved her to dare the explanation.

"That a misunderstanding has occurred between us, brother."

"In plain words—that you have quarrelled," he said, with a slight sneer.

Kate acquiesced in silence to this inference, and prepared herself to meet the storm that

she fully expected would burst upon her. William, however, contrived to keep down his wrath, and merely said, with evidently forced calmness—

“Well, Kate, I am afraid you have quite lost your lover. He came to Bradford two nights since to bid me a long farewell—a farewell of years—it may be for life.”

“I am very sorry, William.”

“Sorry—the deuce!” he retorted, with a shrug of his shoulders. “Certainly, to lose the love of a man with from fifteen hundred to two thousand a year is something to sorrow for.”

Kate did not care to tell him how little she cared for Wilding’s wealth, nor how she longed to hear something more about her lover, even though she might never see him again. William was not likely to stop now he had once commenced.

“I am astonished at you, Kate, I really am! Many people would say you were greatly honoured by Wilding’s notice. He has not

only good looks and a large income, but belongs to a good old county family, both recommendations, and many a higher born woman than you would not have refused his suit."

"Did Mr. Wilding tell you why we quarrelled?" questioned Kate, when her brother had talked himself out of breath.

"He was too honourable for that; he merely told me, to use his own words, 'that circumstances had occurred which would prevent his aspiring to your hand.' I pressed him to tell me what those circumstances were, for I was naturally very much astonished; but he would divulge nothing further than he absolved you from all blame, which I did not then, nor do I now, exactly believe."

"I was not altogether free from blame, William, I confess."

"Then what in the name of heaven has happened?" demanded the brother, sharply.

"I cannot tell you. If Mr. Wilding chose to make it a secret, I certainly will not

betray that secret," rejoined Kate, with calmness.

Her thin lip quivered as Mr. Gladstone turned his pale, proud face upon her, his keen eye looking as if it would pierce into her inmost soul.

Kate returned her brother's gaze with an expression of calm sadness he had never before seen in her face, and which might have touched his heart at any other time when he was less affected than he was at the present moment.

"I always thought you a little bit of a fool, Kate," he said, with increasing irritation. "Always volatile and fickle, always allowing yourself to act upon the impulse of the moment; but this piece of folly surpasses all I ever anticipated."

"I tell you again, William, that the quarrel which has induced Mr. Wilding to break off his engagement with me was very slight," she said, with an almost dignified air.

Her brother evidently disbelieved her by the

incredulous smile which played around his mouth, which smile irritated Kate more than all he had spoken. It more than irritated, it made her heart ache, with a sorrow she had never before experienced, to see that her nearest and, until now, dearest relative was the first to turn against her.

“I think,” he said, the next moment, in a hard tone, “that you had better come home as soon as you possibly can, for you have imposed upon our good friend’s hospitality too long already. I shall be engaged in the court all to-morrow with poor Harry Jobson’s trial; but on Friday I can walk out, and take you back with me.”

He did not stay to know whether this arrangement would be agreeable either to herself or the Vinens; but sauntered up to a group of gentlemen who were chatting away around Miss Vinen’s piano, which no doubt had been discoursing excellent music, but of which he had heard nothing.

Kate yearned for her sister Frances’s society

with a longing she had never experienced since childhood. But Frances was too far removed to give her any chance of catching her eye, and she dared not venture to go in search of her. For once she was really deserted, and she almost felt grateful that it was so, although that desertion gave her the opportunity of brooding over her miserable thoughts and uncertain resolutions.

At last the guests began to depart, and then Frances contrived to whisper a few loving words as she stood shawled and bonnetted with Kate's hand clasped in her own. She little imagined how much passionate love and heart-breaking despair was expressed by the passionate kiss which Kate imprinted upon her lips.

"God bless you, Frances!" she faltered.

"You must really come home, Kate," Frances said, in such sweet, gentle tones that they haunted Kate for years. "You have been away too long, and I will have you back. By-the-bye," and she stooped to whisper this

in her sister's ear, "will you return me the letter I gave you yesterday?"

"I will. I will bring it with me, my dear," Kate said, with what seemed a great effort.

Frances remembered afterwards how odd she thought it.

"Be sure you do, for it is very precious to me," Frances said, with one of her pleasant, ringing laughs. "Now good-bye once more. I hope, Mrs. Morgan, you will come to Bradford to see Sophia in a day or two."

"You may promise that for me to Sophia. I will spend a long day with you all," rejoined Mrs. Morgan.

Frances ran downstairs, for William's voice was audible in the hall. Kate glided after her like a dark shadow chasing the sunlight; she felt the night air blow cold as she stood and watched the two figures gliding away in the moonlight.

She murmured something as she turned into the house again, and her cheek was wet with tears. That murmur was a prayer.

CHAPTER VII.

WITH hand clasped in hand, on that very afternoon, Sarah Crisp sat with Harry Jobson, in his cell in York Castle, gazing with a pale, yet not hopeless countenance on the fading daylight that stole through the prison bars; talking, but by fitful snatches, for the hearts of both were full; and with all their courage Sarah and her lover looked forward with a feeling of dread to the coming morning.

At last Sarah rose to go, for the city clock had chimed the last quarter, and she knew that in a few minutes the warder would come to turn her out.

“Good-bye, Harry. God bless and keep you,” was her simple farewell, as she stood up

beside him, her pale, sad face catching a faint glow from a gleam of the setting sun which at the moment streamed through the prison bars and lit up the dreary cell. "They told me to-day I shouldn't be allowed to see you in the morning, but your mother and I will be at the court early, and with God's blessing I hope we shall be permitted to leave it with you."

"I almost wish that mother may be too ill to come, Sarah," said Harry, clasping her in his arms; "it will be almost too much for me to see her looking on, and too much for her to listen whilst they try her only son."

"She is ill, Harry; but she'll be there for all that, depend upon it," rejoined Sarah, in a very mournful tone. "If you had only seen her rise up in bed that night, and give me one of those awful looks when I came, it would have proved to you what she is capable of going through for you yet."

"Poor mother! Poor, dear mother!" muttered the unhappy son.

“Happy mother I hope to-morrow, Harry. Now, good-bye.”

Once more their lips met, and then Sarah stole quietly away.

Through the darkening city she went until she came to the top of Coney Street, where a dense crowd barred her further progress. Almost unconscious of her action she managed to gain the top of a flight of steps, and was enabled to see a gay procession of men on horseback passing along the street. Then came a grand coach, drawn by four horses, each led by a groom, whilst two trumpeters rode before, blowing a shrill blast that made itself heard above all the clatter and noise of the crowd.

“Is some great person coming into York?” Sarah asked of a woman who stood next her, for she thought it must be King George himself, only that kings don’t ride in such a coach and in such state.

“Why, lass, it’s the judges, and yon’s the sheriff’s grand new coach. It’s a gay sight,

except for them as have friends or relatives to be tried before my lords in the morning. One of them, they say, is terrible for hanging poor folks."

Poor Sarah almost fainted as she heard the woman's words. The whole scene became confused to her eyes in an instant, and when the trumpets again broke forth with another shrill blast, she felt as if a knife had pierced her to the heart.

"Thank God! I have neither relation nor friend to be tried," said the woman. "It's getting dark, and as there's nothing more to see,"—the procession had all passed—"I'll be getting home. Have you far to go?"

"Not very far," said Sarah, drawing her shawl tightly across her sorrowing bosom. "Good night, and thank you, ma'am," and she turned in the direction of her lodgings.

Sarah was very thankful when she arrived there to find poor Mrs. Jobson had fallen asleep in her absence, and devoutly hoped her rest might continue until the morning. She

went down stairs into her landlady's kitchen to ask her for a cup of tea, of which she stood in great need.

"How did you leave Harry to-night, Sarah?" was the good woman's first question.

"Very brave-hearted," answered Sarah, proudly. "Did you see the judges come in?"

"No; but I heard those horrid trumpets that almost made my heart die out of me, when I thought of the poor creatures that are waiting their doom from their fellow men."

"I was told by a woman in the crowd," said Sarah, with trembling lips, "that one of the judges is a terrible one for hanging people for very little."

"That's quite true. He once hung a man for stealing a leg of mutton from a house he broke into at night. God forgive him!"

"Amen!" said Sarah, reverently. "He stands more in need of forgiveness than the poor man he sent to judgment. Shame on the laws that sanction such a murder!"

"It was a cruel sentence, Sarah," rejoined her companion. "But they cannot hang Harry, since the law has been altered. Now, my dear, if you will take my advice, the wisest thing you can do is to go to bed to try and get a good night's rest before morning."

"I am afraid I shall disturb poor Mrs. Jobson."

"No, you mustn't do that, poor woman; you had better sleep with me."

"I want to be up early in the morning, ma'am," said Sarah, as she lay in bed beside her companion. "There is someone I have to see almost before it is daylight, one I would not fail to meet if the wealth of the whole world was offered me."

"I will call you, if you should chance to sleep too long," said her companion, quietly.

"I don't think I am likely to oversleep the time, but I thought it desirable to tell you, in case you should hear me stirring so early. Good night."

Her anxiety was so great, Sarah could not

sleep throughout that night. Her thoughts were all centred on the trials she had to undergo in the morning, and when she heard the clock strike six, she left her bed as quietly as she could, and dressed herself.

“When shall you be back again, Sarah?” asked her companion, as she was about to leave the room.

“I can scarcely say; but I think two hours and a half, at the furthest. I was in hopes that I should not have disturbed you.”

“Oh! never mind me. The morning, I can feel, is very cold. I wish you would put my cloak on over your shawl. You will find it hanging on a nail behind the door.”

Sarah gratefully thanked the woman, put on the cloak, and without another word took her departure as quickly as she could, asking her way from time to time, from persons that she met going to their daily labour, to the place Fanny had named to her.

In spite of the cool fresh air blowing upon her fevered cheeks she could not shake off the

feeling of lassitude that oppressed her, nor the weariness that want of sleep induced. At last she arrived at the cross where her sister-in-law had promised to meet her. But, alas! there was no one there.

"She will be sitting on the other side," Sarah thought to herself, and she ran round. "Oh! she would never deceive me so cruelly."

Fanny was not there, and Sarah found another excuse for her—

"It is still very early, and perhaps Fanny may not have been able to come."

She began pacing up and down, eagerly watching the two outlets with despairing eagerness, in the hope that Fanny would make her appearance, till the grey dawn yielded to the leaden daylight. She heard a clock strike eight, and her heart died within her as she felt that her step-sister would not come.

She sat down at the foot of the cross, and endeavoured to recover her drooping spirits and lost courage. She felt as if her senses would forsake her, so great was the grief

under which she was suffering. The only consolation she experienced was that she had kept Fanny's promised testimony safely locked up in her own breast. She thought that poor Harry would have been doubly disappointed had she divulged to him the promise made by Fanny, and now, after one more look around her, she murmured—

“In God's mercy let me put my whole trust, and hope, that He will manifest Harry's innocence!”

She hurried back to the city as fast as she could walk.

During Sarah's absence the two widows had dressed themselves in their weeds, and were awaiting her return that they might go off to the court together.

Sarah kissed Mrs. Jobson, whose lips were very pale.

“Have you had any breakfast, Sarah?” asked Mrs. Jobson.

“I put Sarah's breakfast upon the hob to keep hot,” said the landlady, in as cheerful a

voice as she could assume. "There is plenty of time, for the judges never go to the court at this season of the year much before ten, and it's now only a little after eight."

Sarah said she could not eat, but took a cup of strong tea, and sitting down beside Mrs. Jobson drank it, the old lady taking one of her hands in her own.

"I should like to hear a chapter out of the Bible read," said Mrs. Jobson, in a quiet voice.

The landlady complied with the request, and Sarah and her adopted mother-in-law listened attentively. When the chapter was finished Mrs. Jobson said—

"Now let us go to the court before my poor Harry is brought in," and she arose and walked towards the door. "My boy shall see no faltering in me to-day," she said proudly, "for I am as certain of his innocence as I am that there is a good and merciful God in heaven," and taking the arm of the landlady on one side and Sarah's on the other, she walked towards the court.

When the three women arrived they found the court densely crowded, and the courage of Mrs. Jobson and Sarah was sadly shaken.

A few trifling cases were speedily disposed of, and then Harry Jobson was called upon to answer to the charge of wilfully and feloniously setting fire to a certain foundry and premises in the parish of Braidsworth, in the county of York, belonging to one William Gladstone.

Sarah stood up with her cheek pale and a palpitating heart; she watched eagerly for the entrance into the dock of Harry Jobson; he came the next moment, walking between two warders. His eye wandered over the crowd, and it was quite evident to Sarah that it was in search of herself; but she despaired of his being able to discover her whereabouts at so great a distance. Taking his mother's hand in her own, she listened as only those can whose fate hangs on the mandate of a fellow being as erring as themselves.

The Clerk of Arraignment asked—

“ Harry Jobson, do you plead guilty or not guilty to the charge preferred against you ?”

“ Not guilty,” replied Harry, in a firm voice that Sarah heard distinctly.

The case against the prisoner was stated by a grey-headed barrister, who dwelt upon the heinousness of the crime, and put forth as facts in his opinion, that the prisoner, and no one else, could have set fire to the premises. After about half an hour’s address, he ended by calling witnesses, which, he said, he felt sure the jury would find fully bore out his statements of the prisoner’s guilt.

The first witness called was Mr. William Gladstone, and Sarah saw him enter the witness box.

“ You are the owner, I believe, of the premises which were nearly all destroyed by fire ?”

“ Yes.”

“ And you know the prisoner at the bar ?”

“ I have known him from his childhood.”

“ And can, no doubt, enlighten the jury as

to the character he has borne?" said his interrogator.

"He has been a steady, hard-working young man, and I never knew or heard anything injurious to his character."

"Ah! This was the opinion you formed of him until your premises were burnt down, I suppose," said his interrogator, with a significant smile.

"That did not alter my opinion, sir. I think him honest still."

"Ah! You have not altered your opinion. Now, Mr. Gladstone, let me ask you, is not this Harry Jobson a member of a certain Trades' Union either in Braidsworth or Bradford?"

"I believe he is," replied William, his countenance undergoing a change.

"Ah! very well; now we shall get on, Mr. Gladstone. And the Trades' Union of which the prisoner is a member binds him by his oath to obey the commands of his superiors, does it not?"

“ I fear so.”

“ Fear so! Why, sir, do you not know that several of the manufacturers have on different occasions received threatening notices from the Trades’ Unionists?”

“ There is no doubt that such is the fact.”

“ Yourself amongst the number, Mr. Gladstone?”

“ I once was remonstrated with by a deputation of Unionists for employing men who did not belong to the Union. It was scarcely a threat.”

“ Well, gentlemen of the jury, what would you call it if a lawless mob of idle scoundrels came upon your premises and insisted—nay, commanded would be the more appropriate word—commanded you to employ none but union men, and named, in pretty strong language, what would be the consequence of refusal? I think you, gentlemen, as I should, will be strongly tempted to call *that* a threat or something worse. May I be permitted to ask you, Mr. Gladstone, was the prisoner at

the bar one of this very courteous deputation?"

William began to feel exceedingly annoyed at the irony of the learned gentleman's manner of speaking, but one look at poor Harry, who was eyeing him wistfully, calmed his irritation, and he felt determined to save him, if he could.

"I asked you, Mr. Gladstone, if Harry Jobson was one of your pleasing visitors."

"No, he was not," said William, quietly.

"I have no further questions to ask. You may stand down, sir." And William left the box much astonished.

"Call Philip Staines."

Staines took Mr. Gladstone's place in the witness box. This man's countenance was a great contrast to the handsome features of William. He was pale, and his restless grey eyes and narrow brow gave indications of his being an enthusiast.

"What is your occupation, Mr. Staines?" asked the barrister.

“ I have no particular occupation. I occasionally preach in the open air to my fellow creatures.”

“ Then you are, I suppose, a minister of the Gospel ?”

“ I have no authorised mission ; nevertheless I have preached occasionally, in the open air.”

“ Well, I suppose it was on some such mission you were out on the night of Mr. Gladstone’s foundry being burnt.”

“ It was.”

“ Did you pass Mr. Gladstone’s foundry that night ?”

“ I did ; somewhere about nine o’clock.”

“ Did you see anything particular as you passed it ?”

“ No.”

“ It was not on fire then ?”

“ Certainly not, to the best of my belief.”

“ Then you did look at the foundry. What caused you to do so ?”

“ Because I had heard from several sources,

some days before, that Mr. Gladstone was what they call a 'Marked Man.' "

" Ah ! you mean, I suppose, a man who has fallen under the displeasure of the Trades' Unionists—men who set all laws, human and divine, at defiance. And you saw nothing about the foundry that you considered particular ?"

" No."

" Had no suspicions ?"

" Had no suspicions till I got to Braids-worth Lane, when I heard a loud report, and on looking round I fancied I saw a faint light in one of the windows. I watched for several minutes, but I saw nothing more, and was just coming away when some one came running towards me."

" Did you know who it was ?"

" Yes," said Staines in a low voice. " It was Harry Jobson."

" In what direction was he coming ?"

" From the foundry."

"From the foundry," said the learned gentleman emphatically. "Did you speak?"

"Yes, but he did not stop, and merely said 'Good night, Mr. Staines,' and ran on."

"Then you had known him before?"

"I had known him from childhood."

"And could not be mistaken?"

"Certainly not."

"Mr. Staines is perfectly correct in what he has said," interposed Jobson in a respectful manner. "I did pass through Braidsworth Lane on the night in question and spoke to him."

Mr. Staines was asked no further questions.

"I have only one more witness to call, my Lord," said the counsel meekly. "Call Rebecca Jones."

"Well, Mrs. Jones, I suppose you recollect the night of the fire at Mr Gladstone's foundry?"

"I do, sir," said Rebecca, in a sharp voice.

"I am glad your memory is so good, ma'am, you can probably tell the jury where you were that night?"

"I was sitting not very far from Mr. Gladstone's foundry from nine o'clock till nigh eleven."

"Yes, I see," said her interrogator in a severe tone. "I suppose, my dear madam, you enjoy sitting out in the open air at night?"

"Not particularly, sir."

"Then what induced you to do so on that precise night?"

"Well sir, I don't care to tell."

"Why not?"

"Because it's a family secret."

"Family secret, or not," said the judge, "you must answer my learned brother's question."

"Well, then, if you must know, me and my good man had had a little quarrel," said Mrs. Jones.

"Ah! I see he made the house too hot for you?"

"Not at all. I allays goes out when we quarrels ; it gives he time to cool his temper a little," and Mrs. Jones paused.

"Yes—what then ?"

"Why, then I stays out for two or three hours, and he gets fidgety and awfully afraid that I have gone and drowned myself. And then, when I think as how I've staid out long enough, I goes home, and I find he's quite lamb-like."

"A very judicious plan of yours, my dear Mrs. Jones. And so, whilst your husband was getting cool, you were sitting near Mr. Gladstone's foundry. Quite alone, I suppose?"

"No, I was not, for people were coming and going, but at last I was alone."

"And then I suppose you noticed something ?" said the learned gentleman, in a wheedling tone.

"To be sure I did."

"What was it you noticed ?"

"I saw Jim Gilling give his termagant of a wife a good thrashing, and served her right."

"Well, we'll leave Mr. and Mrs. Jim Gilling to settle their little family disputes. You saw something else, I suppose?"

"I don't think I did," replied Mrs. Jones, doggedly.

"It is very important, Mrs. Jones, that you should recollect perfectly what did happen on the night in question," said the learned gentleman, somewhat nettled. "You have told several of your friends that you saw a great deal more than what you have told the jury. I must request you to make the same statement now."

Mrs. Jones's face became redder as the learned gentleman put out this mild threat; but she was not to be frightened. Perfectly aware of her gossiping words to her neighbours, she was very much tempted to utter an oath at her own stupidity, for poor Harry Jobson's sad countenance made her wish to save him, if she could.

"Come, Mrs. Jones," said the lawyer, with

still greater asperity, after a long pause, "if you will not tell your tale yourself I must try and help you to do so. Did you not see the prisoner at the bar come out of Mr. Gladstone's foundry a few minutes before the fire broke out?"

Mrs. Jones refused to answer the question, as she again had a glimpse of Harry's face.

"Did you hear what I said, ma'am?"

"How is it possible to remember everything one sees, sir?" said Mrs. Jones, putting one corner of her apron to her eye.

"It's not so long ago, that you have forgotten it."

"That's all very well for you to say so, but it's plain enough to see that you've never been a mother."

The poor lawyer was sadly disconcerted at this speech, for judge, jury, and audience could not restrain their laughter.

"What has being a mother to do with it?" said her interrogator, savagely.

"To do with it!" she echoed his words disdainfully. "Why, my little Jereboam took the fever that very night."

"Well, suppose little Jereboam did, that wouldn't prevent your recollecting all about Mr. Gladstone's fire that night."

"Wouldn't it, though? I wish you'd had as many children as I have—"

Again she was interrupted by great laughter.

"It's no laughing matter to have a blessed child taken with fever;—it made me forget everything I saw that night, and as to my seeing the prisoner at the bar come out of the foundry, I can't swear it—it must have been some other night."

"Why, my good woman—"

"No more a good woman than you."

"Good or bad, I have two ladies of your acquaintance who can swear that you told them—"

"Then produce them, and let them swear

what they like, for I won't swear to please you."

"But you shall," said her interrogator.

"But I won't."

"Then I must apply to his Lordship to commit you to prison for contempt."

"I tell you, once for all, that I won't swear just what you wish, and take an innocent man's life away."

Mrs. Jones, without further par lance, was committed, and marched off between two constables.

Another woman was put into the witness-box, and swore to having heard Mrs. Jones say she saw the prisoner come out of the factory a few minutes before the fire was discovered.

Sarah did not hear this woman's evidence, as she was attending to poor Mrs. Jobson, and she turned to a man who was standing next to her, saying—

"What did that woman say?"

"Enough to convict the poor fellow," said the man, kindly.

"God help us!" said Sarah, sobbing bitterly, although striving to be calm.

"Are you related to the prisoner?" asked the man.

"No; but that poor widow is his mother," answered Sarah, pointing to Mrs. Jobson.

"Then you had better get her out of court as quickly as possible before it comes to the worst."

Sarah looked at Mrs. Jobson with eyes swimming in tears that would come in spite of all her endeavours to prevent them.

The man at her side seeing how utterly unable the girl was to get the poor widow away, said, speaking to Mrs. Jobson—

"They are going to clear the court, ma'am; you had better get out before the crush comes on."

"I can't leave my son, sir," said the mother, smiling faintly.

"Lord bless you, he'll be with you in a few

minutes," said the kind-hearted man ; " but he will go out at the back door. Come."

And the man gave her his arm.

" Are we to go, Sarah ?"

" Certainly, mother ; we shall be better outside," and the poor widow suffered herself to be led out, Sarah and her landlady following.

" Where are we to go to ?" asked Mrs. Jobson.

" I know a very decent person close by who will, I am sure, give you house room," replied the man, in a kind tone.

" Thank you," said Sarah.

" This is the house, ma'am," added the man, addressing Mrs. Jobson, who looked about in a bewildered manner. " Mrs. Jonas has known sorrow herself, and she can pity and assist others who are in trouble."

" When will Harry come, Sarah ?" asked Mrs. Jobson. " I thought some one told us he would come directly."

" I did, ma'am," said the workman. " Come

into the house and sit down. Mrs. Jonas," he added, meeting the woman of the house, "I have brought some friends, if you will allow them to sit down for a time."

"Oh ! to be sure—they're quite welcome, James," she replied, putting chairs near the fire ; "pray get close to the fire—it's very cold to-day."

"Sarah," said Mrs. Jobson, "you had better go back and watch for Harry, and bring him here at once," and she sunk into a comfortable arm-chair.

"There's something the matter with her," said Sarah's companion, who had been watching Mrs. Jobson's peculiar countenance. "I fear Harry's coming back will be of little consequence to her, poor thing."

"She's only fallen asleep," said Sarah, as she saw Mrs. Jobson's head gradually sink back on the cushion of the chair. "She will sleep now for some hours."

"You will have been in the court on business, I imagine," said Mrs. Jonas.

"We have, ma'am," said Sarah, looking down. "I did not wish the poor old lady to come, but she would not be kept back; and, you see, the exertion has quite knocked her up."

"Have you far to go back?" asked Mrs. Jonas, kindly.

"Yes, a good long ride.. We live at Braidsworth," said Sarah.

"Braidsworth," repeated the woman; "I never heard of the place—but what I were going to say was that you shall be quite welcome to stay here all night, if you wish it. I don't know you myself, but I can see you are in trouble."

"I thank you, kindly," said Sarah, "but we have friends in York, and unless mother grows worse, we will not trespass so much upon your kindness."

At this moment the man, who had been absent some minutes, looked in with a very white, frightened face.

"Come in, James," said Mrs. Jonas, and he obeyed.

CHAPTER VIII.

HARRY JOBSON was found guilty a very few minutes after his poor old mother left the court, although Mr. Gladstone gave him an excellent character, and declared as emphatically as he could that he was sure of his innocence. But the Judge, in summing up, said that one of the witnesses had distinctly sworn to having seen him coming out of the foundry yard, and he was the only person that had been suspected.

It was late in the day when the jury brought in their verdict of guilty, and Mr. Gladstone had scarcely recovered from the shock at seeing Harry's suppressed agony as the verdict was proclaimed, when he felt some one touch

him on the shoulder, and on looking round perceived Dr. Vinen standing close to him.

"Come out of this stifling atmosphere," said the Doctor, "I have something to say to you."

"Did you ever know anything so disgraceful?" said William, as he forced his way through the crowd. "The poor lad has been legally murdered. Harry will sink under the disgrace."

"My dear Gladstone, you must have more fortitude," said Dr. Vinen. "I am quite as much shocked as yourself at the termination of this unhappy trial, but something else has occurred."

He took his friend's hand in his own, and attempted to proceed, but a broken sob was all that followed.

"Sit down on this bench, my dear sir," said William, who supposed that some great calamity had befallen his good old friend; "perhaps the misfortune may not be as great as you think when we come to examine it."

"God afflicts all of us in His own good time, and for His all-wise purpose," said the clergyman in a low voice, "but this affliction which he has laid upon you—"

"Upon me!" cried William, a fearful thought rushing through his brain, which well nigh unnerved him for the moment. "Has death been again busy in my family?"

"No."

"Then what is it?"

"It is of your sister Kate I have to tell you. Neither Mrs. Vinen nor I ever suspected the villain; if we had we should have thwarted him. We always imagined Kate's engagement with William Wilding so definitely arranged that— But, good Heaven, my dear Gladstone, you are faint."

"I shall be better in a moment," said William, averting his face. "Give me a little breathing time. There, now you may go on."

"I have scarcely courage."

"Kate has left your house in company with a villain, but I am so taken by surprise that I

cannot even guess who the villain is. Do you know his name?"

"Captain Silvester, I fear."

"You are not certain, then?" said William, still averting his face, though his voice betrayed his agony.

"Circumstances, I am afraid, leave no doubt as to the man. My son-in-law and my wife, who are, I trust, the only persons who are aware of this unhappy business, saw them together late last night. My wife found a letter lying upon her dressing table this morning. Need I tell you that it was in Kate's own handwriting, and that the poor girl thanks her in touching terms for all her kindness, and entreats her forgiveness for the rash act she has taken?"

"And not one word about her family, I suppose?" asked her brother, sternly.

"Many—very many. But, my dear friend, we are wasting time, which is most precious to us. I have ordered a chaise-and-four to be ready at the Crown Inn, and we may overtake

them. They cannot have got very far on the road, I believe."

William seemed stupefied by this intelligence, and did not stir from the spot till his friend took his arm and led him rapidly towards the Inn, where the carriage and horses were standing ready at the door.

"Come, my dear Gladstone, arouse yourself, and hope that all is for the best."

"Disgrace would be bitter to bear, sir," said William. "I had much rather you had told me she was dead."

"I am sure the bitterness will pass from you," answered his kind-hearted friend, more cheerfully. "I feel convinced Kate has allowed herself to be led into this dilemma from a feeling of despair at being deserted by William Wilding, to whom I have reason to know she is fondly attached, and I think her own womanly modesty and honour will protect her, even in that profligate scoundrel's company."

"You might as well scatter dust upon the earth and expect it to bring forth rocks, as to attempt to convince me that anything but shame and dishonour will ever attend her. I cannot allow you to set out, sir, without taking some refreshment."

"I have already attended to that ; I ordered sandwiches to be put into the pockets of the chaise," said the Rector. "Get in, and let us be off without further delay. Landlord, I hope you have given us four good horses."

"As good as any on the road, sir. You will not be long in getting to the first place for changing."

"Will there be any difficulty in procuring fresh horses at the first stage?" asked the clergyman.

"Not the slightest difficulty, sir," was the reply, and the Doctor entered the chaise. The landlord closed the door, and ordered the post-boys to drive on at the horses' utmost speed, and the next moment they were carried

through the streets, past churches and human beings, all of which rushed before their eyes like the changing phantoms of a dream.

Daylight soon faded into darkness, for the days were almost at their shortest. Neither of the travellers spoke more than a few sentences, each ensconced in his own corner of the chaise, each buried in his own sad, gloomy thoughts.

It may seem strange, but from outward show Dr. Vinen appeared the more deeply moved. It may really have been the case, for William Gladstone's pride prevented his realising the full extent of his sorrow, whereas the worthy Rector felt and saw in a moment Kate's unhappy position, and how bitterly she herself would deplore it ere long. He was, too, very much attached to Kate, loving her almost as a daughter, whilst William's affection had always been much more attracted to the firm principles and common sense of his sister Frances.

The horses had twice been changed, and

the travellers were twenty-three miles from York. It was a cold night, and when Dr. Vinen put his head out of the window flakes of snow fell upon his face and shoulders.

"I hope we shall not have much snow," he said to his companion, drawing himself into the chaise, and putting up the glass; "the air is very keen."

"I should not be surprised if we have a storm," said William, rousing himself, "the glass fell considerably this morning."

"I am very glad I told them to put a flask of brandy and water into the chaise as well as the sandwiches," and the Doctor began examining the pockets. "Ah! here it is—take some, Gladstone, it will do you all the good in the world, and so will the sandwiches, for you must be really hungry."

"I am faint, for I've had nothing to eat since I breakfasted. I will take some brandy and water, but I cannot touch the sandwiches."

"You will be able to do so presently," replied his friend. "Keep up a brave heart, and all will yet be well."

"It is very good of you, sir, to say so at any rate," said William, again ensconcing himself in his corner of the chaise. "It is still snowing, I think."

"Yes, I am sorry for it. I wish the wind would blow it off."

After a considerable pause the Rector again broke the silence, saying—

"Do you know where Wilding is, Gladstone?"

"Somewhere on the road between York and London, I believe," was the reply. "I had a letter from him this morning, poor fellow."

"Had you, indeed," said the Rector, who was anxious to make his friend talk. He did not approve the silent system he had hitherto adopted. "Did he mention your sister?"

"Yes, several times."

"Were his expressions kind?" asked the

good Rector, forgetting how inquisitive he was becoming, nor did it strike his companion as being so.

"Yes," was the reply, "and his every expression was most affectionate, lamenting his own conduct for acting so rashly as he had done. Had Kate waited for another week she would have had him at her feet again."

"Poor child! poor dear! so young and to be driven into such a step through shame and pride. God, mercifully protect her!" murmured the clergyman, as he looked out of the windows and saw, through the misty panes, the snow upon the hedge-rows.

In a few minutes they were rattling through the streets of a town, when Mr. Gladstone roused himself to look out once more. He could but faintly see the houses, and those only which were close to an oil lamp that threw an uncertain light upon the dreary scene around.

"Why, Bill, what's in the wind to-night,

to blow up so many carriages and four," said one of the stable boys, who was busy about the horses, addressing his companion, as our traveller's chaise stopped.

"Well, can't exactly say," rejoined the other, with great indifference. "Great folks from York 'sizes, I suppose."

"York 'sizes!" chuckled the other, giving one of the horses a smart smack with his hand. "It's my belief this and the one afore it have had nothing to do with the 'sizes."

"Then who do you 'magine they be?" asked the other.

"Well, as near as I can guess, it's a runaway."

"A runaway!" exclaimed his companion, "what be your reason for your b'lief?"

"Why, there was a gal in the chaise that came before this."

"Well, what of that?"

"Why, she had a veil tied close over her face, and the good-looking young chap beside her seemed awful fond of her."

"Then you got a sight of the lady's face, did you?"

"No, I didn't."

"The more fool you; I'd have had a peep under her bonnet, I'll be bound."

"Not you, clever as you be. She sat crouched up in the corner, and when the young chap spoke to her she did nothing but cry, I fancied."

"P'raps she was repenting the step sh'd a taken," said the other.

William Gladstone heard every word of the conversation, and did not draw up the glass until the chaise once more rattled over the stones. It was by no means pleasant to hear his sister thus talked about, for there was not the slightest doubt who the runaways were.

"Where do you think they have gone?" asked William.

"Most likely to London. I don't think they are far in advance of us," said the worthy Rector. "It is more than probable Captain Silvester will not think it requisite

to proceed so rapidly now that he may reasonably feel assured there is no one in pursuit. Are you not hungry?"

"Not in the least. Is this a short stage?"

"Yes, and I know the man who keeps the inn at the next place; he is a very worthy fellow. We may very safely ask him any questions we deem necessary. Are you expected home to-night?"

"No; why do you ask?"

"Because I hope we may get back again before your sisters hear of Kate's absence or our own."

"I fear that's a vain hope, under the circumstances," said his companion, with a sigh.

The Rector kept up a conversation which lasted till they reached the end of the stage.

"There appears to be something like life stirring here," said Dr. Vinen, letting down the window on his side, the door being immediately opened by one of the stable boys.

"Why, my lad, what time do you go to bed here?" asked the Rector.

"Not till the mail comes in, sir," was the reply.

"Is it nearly due?"

"In a quarter of an hour, sir."

"Well, Gladstone, we had better get out and take something to warm us."

"I think so too," answered William.

"Well, then, follow me," said the Rector, and he hurried into the house.

A female servant met them in the passage.

"Shew us into a private room, my dear, and tell your master to come and speak to me," Dr. Vinen said, addressing the pretty chambermaid.

"This way, if you please, gentlemen," and they were conducted into a sitting room, where a cheerful fire was burning.

"This would be very agreeable if we had but the heart to enjoy it," said the Rector to his friend, who was pacing up and down the room. "Ah! Mr. Biddulph, how d'ye do?"

he added, as the landlord entered ; " have you much company in the house just now ?"

" A tolerable sprinkling, sir. If this weather continues, though, business, I fear, will not be improved," was the reply.

" Probably not, Mr. Biddulph," rejoined the clergyman. " I am sorry we are compelled to travel in it, but we are anxious to join some friends who preceded us this morning from the north. I should imagine they have changed horses here in passing through."

He spoke in so careless a tone that the landlord had not the slightest suspicion how much anxiety was concealed behind all this apparent indifference.

" I have no doubt they would, sir," returned the landlord. " Did they travel with a chaise-and-pair, or a chaise-and-four ?"

" They wanted to get on as fast as possible, so I imagine they would have had four horses, like ourselves," said the Rector, with a pleasant smile.

" There has only been one couple here to-

day with four horses, and I should hardly think they are the party you are in quest of," said Mr. Biddulph, with a satirical smile on his countenance.

"What makes you think that?"

"Because it is an elopement!"

"An elopement!" cried the Rector.

"Yes; and, what's more, the pair are in the house at this very moment."

"The devil they are!" exclaimed Dr. Vinen, forgetting both his caution and his calling in the surprise this information caused him. "Is the lady young and pretty, and the gentleman—the villain," he added, correcting himself, "is he soldier-like in his appearance?"

"I did not see the lady's face, but the gentleman answers your description," said the landlord. "If you would like to see the lady, I will take you immediately to the room she occupies."

"Pray do, Mr. Biddulph," said the Rector, impatiently.

"Something very extraordinary has hap-

pened since the lady and gentleman arrived—but I can tell you that after you have seen if the lady is the one you are in quest of.”

“We will follow you, Mr. Biddulph,” said the Rector. “One glance will be sufficient to assure us whether this lady is the one we seek. Heaven grant it may!”

“Keep behind a little, Gladstone; I will go in first,” and so saying he motioned Mr. Biddulph to throw open the door, and with a throbbing heart followed him into the room.

“God of mercy! what is this?” Gladstone heard the Doctor exclaim, and rushing in he saw, not the handsome person of Captain Silvester seated beside his unhappy sister, but—

“William Wilding!”

“Yes, William Wilding, as I’m a living man!” cried the Rector.

“Where is the villain?” demanded Mr. Gladstone, seeing only Wilding and his sister in the room.

“The gentleman is up stairs, in a very sad

state," said the landlord. "I told you something strange had happened, but—"

"Gladstone," interrupted William Wilding, "I resign Kate into your hands for the present. Speak kindly to her, and look tenderly on her fault, if fault it was."

Wilding's arm supported the half fainting girl as he led her to her brother, and even after William had kissed her burning forehead, and embraced her far more tenderly than he had ever done before, his arm still lingered near its late resting place, as if loth to leave it.

"What is the matter with your arm, Wilding?" asked Gladstone, in a grave tone, the next minute, on noticing that he had his right arm in a sling.

"Only a trifling sprain, which I got in a scuffle with my rival," said Wilding, with a smile. "I am afraid his hurts will not mend so easily."

"He is rightly served," exclaimed Doctor Vinen. "I think, Gladstone, we may beg

Mr. Biddulph to turn our horses towards home again. Remain here a few minutes until I come back," and the worthy clergyman left the room.

"Show me into the gentleman's bed room," he said to the landlord, as they arrived on the landing. "I mean the gentleman who came here in company with that young lady we have just seen."

"The doctor gave strict orders, when he left, his patient was not to be disturbed, or he would not be answerable for the consequences," said Mr. Biddulph.

"I will not remain a minute in the room," said the clergyman, with an irresistible smile. "I merely wish to deliver a message."

"The gentleman is very ill, sir; very ill indeed," said the landlord, without moving from the spot.

"I am aware of that; but what I have to say will not agitate him in the slightest degree. Come, sir."

And the landlord, awed by the authorita-

tive tone in which he spoke, ushered him into Captain Silvester's bedroom.

A lamp was burning on the dressing-table, and a bright fire blazed in the grate. The unhappy man himself could be seen lying on his back in the bed, the curtains of which were undrawn, and there was sufficient light to show the pale face that rested on the pillow.

"Is that the doctor?" he asked, in a sharp tone, without looking in the direction of the door, as he heard Dr. Vinen enter. "You said you would not be back till the morning, and it isn't daylight yet."

"I am sorry to see you in such a lamentable condition, Captain Silvester," said a sonorous voice beside him; "and still more sorry when I recollect the cause which has plunged you into such suffering."

The Captain opened his eyes and looked fixedly at the Rector for a minute or two without speaking. A bitter, sneering laugh was audible in the stillness that succeeded this pause, followed by an oath.

"I suppose you have come to tell me that I am properly punished for not going to church on Sundays, sir," he said, in a derisive tone. "That devil, Wilding, has shattered my arm frightfully, I can assure you."

"I am sorry for it; but you should not have interfered with a lady whom I still hope to see his wife," answered the Rector, gravely. "Your sin, sir, in this transaction is very great."

"I daresay it is," said Captain Silvester, biting his lip; "but if that fool had not come across us it would have been deeper still. Curse him! I say, to step between my prize and me at the very moment it was within my grasp, and then to make me a cripple for life as well—curse him!"

The speaker's face became distorted with impotent passion as he gave utterance to these bitter imprecations in a voice that showed how little repentance had touched his feelings.

"I suppose, Dr. Vinen," he said, the next

moment, with something of former gentlemanly breeding perceptible in his manner; "I suppose you have some motive in coming to my room so unexpectedly?"

"I have, Captain Silvester," said the Rector, in a kind voice. "This young lady whom you snatched from my protection is, I need not assure you, very dear to me, and to many others, to whom her good fame is of consequence."

"Well, sir!"

"You are a comparative stranger in Braidsworth, and perhaps are not aware how very fondly and how very long Miss Kate Gladstone has been beloved by William Wilding?"

"Perhaps not," said the Captain, with a sneer.

"They have been attached, I may say, from childhood, and during the whole of that time I never remember a quarrel occurring between them until about a fortnight ago, when something of the kind took place. You, sir, unfortunately, about that time came to reside at

‘The Rookery,’ and attracted by the beauty and goodness of the lady, as well as eager to gratify your own vanity, if nothing worse, by such a conquest, laid siege to Kate’s heart.”

The stern look fixed upon his countenance was unheeded by the wounded man, and the Rector continued—

“In an evil hour you conquered, Captain Silvester. Stung by Wilding’s fancied neglect the unhappy girl revenged herself upon her lover by listening to your blandishments, and at length, wrought on by promises, which, I fear, it was never intended should be fulfilled—”

“There, sir, you lie!” exclaimed the Captain, with passionate emphasis. “As God is my witness I would have married her. I made a solemn vow, the moment Miss Gladstone entrusted herself to my care, that I would make her my wife, and but for what has transpired I should have fulfilled that vow.”

“I thank God, Captain Silvester, that your sin is not so great as I thought. It is my

duty now to tell you that she is lost to you for ever ; for which purpose I have stolen from the room in which Miss Gladstone, her brother, and her future husband are awaiting my return. Now, Captain Silvester, let me ask you to do what you can to shield the dear girl from obloquy, never to breathe a syllable of what has passed this night to any human being."

Captain Silvester's only reply to this appeal was a heavy groan, and covering his face with one hand. Dr. Vinen respected the grief of the apparently awakened sinner, but remained silent, watching the tempest which was raging fearfully within him.

After a terrible struggle Captain Silvester overcame his feelings sufficiently to say, with a very altered tone—

" Beg her, sir, to forgive and forget such a wretch as I am. And, Dr. Vinen, let me ask you, as a good and righteous man, to pray for me."

" God, in his goodness and mercy, will for-

give and bless you yet," said the Rector, taking him by the hand. "Am I to tell your father of your illness?"

"No, thank you, sir; I will send my servant over in the morning for my mother to come to me," said the Captain, in a gentler voice. "Good-bye."

As he spoke he closed his eyes, and Dr. Vinen left the room.

When he entered the apartment where his three friends were sitting he found them all prepared for their homeward journey, but ere leaving the room he pulled a chair close to William Gladstone, and whispered in his ear an assurance that they had nothing to dread from Captain Silvester's indignation. William grasped the Rector's hand, and without another word followed Kate and Wilding into the chaise with a relieved feeling, for though assured Kate was safe, his proud heart had been fretting with the dread of an exposure of his sister's foolish flight.

"The moon seems determined to shine,

Kate," said Dr. Vinen, as he got into the chaise and drew up the glass. "I believe we shall get to Bradford ere it goes down."

His hand rested on Kate's for a moment as he adjusted the window, and hers felt so hot he could not help mentally fearing that fever was coming on. He held his peace, however, and began talking to the two young men in his usual manner, whilst Kate lay back in her own corner and dozed till they arrived at the end of the journey.

CHAPTER IX.

UPWARDS of six weeks have passed since the events recorded in the last chapter, and the snow is nearly three feet deep in Braidsworth as well as in the town of Bradford. The frost began the night of Kate Gladstone's flight, and now it is the last day of the year.

Frances Gladstone had watched the winter setting in so early and so severely as it had done, with the greatest anxiety, for many reasons, and one of these was that Kate had returned home struck down with low fever, so suddenly that the younger sister thought over many things besides the deep snow and cold, piercing easterly winds, as she sat night

after night at her sister's bed-side, and heard her wandering murmurs.

All the nursing and watching of the poor stricken girl devolved upon Frances, for Sophia was herself too ill, and her brother William too hard worked during the day to permit either of them to share this duty with her.

Old Hannah had as much house work to do as it was possible for her to get through, yet she wished to take her share of the duties of the sick room, but after three or four nights sitting up, she fell asleep when left by herself, so Frances persuaded the honest old woman to go to bed, and with a small table, placed before a large, comfortable, easy chair, with a lamp so shaded as to prevent the light falling upon the invalid's bed, Frances read and thought by turns, whilst the wind blew and the snow fell with a deadened sound on the window panes.

Kate varied very much—quiet and rational one day, delirious with increase of fever the next; but Doctor Smith, their old friend at

Braidsworth, all through the case, said he was confident she would recover, and his opinion gave Frances much confidence and comfort, although it must be confessed at times she was both weary and low spirited.

On this last night of the year Frances is sitting beside the fire with a book in her lap, for she has read until her eyes ache. The merry sound of bells float into the room, and Frances thinks of all and every one that are dear to her; not merely of the living, but the dead. Sophia is sleeping within a few yards of her; William is perhaps drinking a happy new year to his now firm friend, Mr. Simpkin; and Alfred Vinen—and here her lips murmured a prayer—keeping Christmas on the wide ocean; Kate is lying calm, but not asleep, beside her.

“Frances,” something whispers at her elbow, so low that it makes her start.

Frances deliberately shuts her book and places the lamp on the table so that the light should not disturb her sister.

"I have been very ill, have I not?" asks the invalid.

"You have, Kate dear."

Kate heaved a deep sigh, and tried to collect her thoughts, but her brain was still feeble, and she could not carry her memory back so as to recall anything that had occurred just previous to her fever.

"How long have I been ill, Frances?" she asked, fixing her bright eyes upon her sister.

"Upwards of six weeks, my dear," replied her sister.

"How very thin my hands are; I can almost see through them, I declare. Is our brother in the house?"

"No; he will be very soon. It is New Year's Eve, and he is rather late in consequence."

New Year's Eve was a source of wonder for Kate. Every New Year's Eve they had ever spent, even in Braidsworth, all came up vividly in her mind, but she could not recollect things that had occurred just before her illness.

"Is Sophia asleep, Frances?" she asked, a moment after.

"I left her so an hour ago," was Frances' reply.

"Poor Sophia! Give my love to her when she wakes, and tell her to come and see me," said Kate, in an exceedingly gentle voice.

Frances was astonished at the tenderness of the speech, which was evidently heart-felt. Kate's illness had really made her more loving, and Frances hailed the change with delight.

"Sit down in the light, Frances, and let me look at you," said Kate, the next minute; and Frances sat with her face turned to her sister, who lay looking at her with that dreamy interest people usually feel when recovering from a lengthened illness. After looking at her sister for a time Kate fell asleep.

"I wonder if Sophia is awake?" thought Frances, on seeing Kate close her eyes, and her regular breathing had assured her the invalid actually slept. "I cannot bear to sit here alone

on this particular night, and could even put up with Hannah's old stories if I did not know she has company of her own. I will go and see if Sophia is awake."

She took up her book and stole quietly into her eldest sister's room.

"I was wishing for you, my dear Frances," said Sophia, as soon as her sister softly entered, "it is so dull and it makes me feel unusually depressed to be alone on New Year's Eve. Is Kate asleep?"

"I am glad to say she is," was Frances's response, as she smoothed Sophia's pillows and adjusted the lamp. "To-night she has talked rationally for the first time. Hush! William is coming upstairs, I think. I was convinced he would not spend New Year's Eve from home."

Mr. Gladstone the next moment entered the room, accompanied by William Wilding, whose first question was after Kate.

"She is much better," said Frances.

"Then I may see her," he said, impetuously.

"On no account. She is enjoying the first genuine sleep she has had for weeks, and I will not allow her to be disturbed. I am so very glad you came to see us to-night, William."

"Where is your New Year's Eve fare, Frances?" asked her brother, who seemed in extraordinary spirits. "Ring the bell, William, and we'll order Hannah to bring us a good-sized punch bowl."

"You seem inclined to drink the old year out and the new year in," said Frances, with a smile.

"I do, sisters both; I have good news to tell you."

"What is it?" asked Sophia, her hitherto somewhat grave face assuming a smile.

"In the first place—Harry Jobson is out of gaol."

"That is good news indeed," cried Frances, clapping her hands; "but how did it happen, William?"

"Why, it is quite a romance," said her

brother, stirring the fire and making a good blaze. "You remember that pretty girl that poor William Crisp brought up."

"Oh, yes—Fanny; she was half-sister to poor Sarah Crisp."

"I believe Fanny was her name. Well, this young woman went before one of the Bradford magistrates and made oath Harry Jobson had nothing whatever to do with the fire,—that he had been both unjustly and unlawfully condemned, and that a man of the name of Smooth, who had come to Braidsworth last winter as a delegate from one of those infamous Trades' Unions, was the villain who fired my foundry."

"And Harry, I suppose, was immediately liberated," said Frances, eagerly.

"Not quite so fast as that, Frances," said her brother, smiling at her impatience. "Justice does not travel quite so fast in England. Oaths, affidavits, examinations, and such like take up a considerable time, and the girl's story had to be thoroughly gone

into and every point investigated, but after all the routine a warrant was issued for the apprehension of the villain Smooth, or whatever his real name may be."

"How did Fanny know where he was to be found, brother?" asked Sophia.

"She left Braidsworth with him, just before the death of Crisp's child. He promised to marry her, I understand, which promise, I need scarcely add, was never fulfilled. She was desperately fond of the rascal, but a long course of brutal ill-treatment has so estranged her from him that at last she took courage and denounced him. I heard, too, that this Fanny had promised Sarah Crisp to appear and save Harry at the Assizes, but not fulfilling her promise, the poor fellow was left to his fate."

"That is really good news," said Sophia, evidently much pleased.

"Now for my second piece of intelligence," continued the brother.

"I hope your second will be equally good with the first," said Frances, smiling.

"I have half a mind not to tell it you," rejoined William.

"Do so if you like. I can wait patiently, brother," said Frances; "you cannot delay telling us beyond to-morrow at breakfast."

"We are going back to Braidsworth, Frances!" said William, gravely.

"To Braidsworth!" exclaimed both his sisters, in a breath.

"To 'The Rookery?'" asked Sophia.

"To 'The Rookery,'" echoed William, smiling. "Mr. Silvester has sent me a formal notice that he intends ceasing to be my tenant after February. I shall not look out for a new one, so we shall all find ourselves in the dear old place again very shortly."

For some minutes neither of his sisters could utter a word; but at length Frances rallied from her surprise, and asked—

"Do you think, William, we shall be justi-

fied in occupying so large a house in our present circumstances? Another important matter suggests itself to my mind," and she paused.

"What is it, Frances?"

"Why, how would it suit you to have to walk to and from Bradford every day?"

"I have thought over the matter thoroughly, my dear girl; and I think I can afford to live in 'The Rookery' again; and as regards Bradford, my occupation there will soon be at an end. Simpkin and I have agreed to re-establish the foundry at Braidsworth. It was a great piece of good fortune that I did not let it after the fire."

"You will require capital, William," said Sophia, who took as great interest in the scheme as anyone, although she almost fancied she was not likely to live long enough to see it carried out. "You cannot do anything without money."

"You are quite right, Sophia," returned her brother. "The place could not be kept

open a week under such circumstances. Simpkin has sold his place here for a good sum, and I have found friends to advance me the same amount on my own personal security. We are both satisfied that we have more than enough to start the concern, and as we are neither of us afraid of hard work, we trust that with God's blessing we shall do pretty well."

"How is it that Mr. Silvester is going to give up 'The Rookery' just at the time we require it, brother?" asked Sophia, who had been kept in ignorance of the cause of Kate's illness. "I thought both he and his wife were so charmed with the place."

"He gives as the reason for leaving, that the air is too keen for Mrs. Silvester," replied William. "Never mind why others leave Braidsworth so long as we get back there, dear Sophia. Come, Wilding, brew the punch, there's a good fellow, whilst I talk with these ignoramuses a little."

"But what about my pupils?" said Frances.

"Why, get a circular printed, and send round to their parents, informing them that you intend giving up the school."

"I don't think I shall give it up, William," said Frances. "I think I shall march you three off to Braidsworth, and stay here with Hannah."

"I'm quite agreeable. Kate will do well enough for Sophia and me," cried her brother, laughing.

Frances looked at Wilding, and smiled, for the latter did not seem to agree with the arrangement.

"I shall want Kate soon," he said, looking up from his punch brewing.

"Then you can't have her, my good fellow. You must just look out for somebody else," said Gladstone, wickedly. "Let me see—there's Amelia Vinen, she will do just as well."

"No, she won't," said Wilding, ladling out the punch into the wine-glasses; "take her

yourself. She'll do better for you than for me."

"I wish she would have me," rejoined Gladstone, laughing.

"Have you ever made her acquainted with your wish, William?" asked Frances, significantly.

"Don't ask impertinent questions, foolish girl. How do you know that I haven't something to tell you about her brother Alfred?"

"I don't want to know more about him than I do," said Frances.

"Indeed!" replied her brother.

"Yes, indeed!" and Frances pulled a ship letter from her pocket she had received only a few hours before.

"You are a witch, I do believe!" said her brother, rather disappointed. "One can never tell you anything but what one is sure to find that you have known it an age beforehand."

"How can you say so, William? Haven't

you just told me two excellent bits of news, neither of which I had the slightest idea had happened? Did you know till now I had received a letter?"

"To tell you the truth, I did not know; but the Rector told me to-day they had heard from the Captain. When does he come home?"

"It is quite uncertain," she replied, shaking her head; "it may be a month, and it may be a year. Those foreign stations are so wearisome, and everything connected with them so uncertain."

"Well, here's a happy new year to us all!" said Gladstone, emptying his glass. "It is the first, and I hope it will be the last we shall ever spend out of the old house at home."

Sophia wiped away a tear that had come unbidden to her eyes, as her brother spoke. No one was watching her, all being busy with their own thoughts for the future, William Gladstone seeing the fires blazing once more

in the foundry, whilst Frances was trying to think calmly and quietly about all the sudden change of prospects that had come upon them.

"I wish Kate was with us," said Wilding, as if the thought had only just struck him.
"Dear, darling Kate!"

CHAPTER X.

KATE GLADSTONE being blessed with an excellent constitution, once the crisis was past, mended rapidly. The more she progressed towards renewed health, the more her sister Frances perceived the beneficial change that had taken place in her character and disposition. Frances wished her brother was not quite so busy with his new schemes as to prevent his noticing the change as well as herself. However, she was amply compensated for William's seeming indifference by the rapturous delight exhibited by Wilding, who was all that a lover should be.

"There's no concealment between us now, Frances," said Kate, the first day she was

able to sit up for a short time in an easy-chair. "Wilding and I have told each other everything."

"I am sincerely glad you have, sister. There should be no concealment between husband and wife," observed Frances, with great gravity.

"There never shall for the future," said Kate, cheerfully. "I feel that I have behaved very badly, and am most grateful to God I was so mercifully saved. I think, Frances, William grows handsomer every day."

This was said with so much gravity that Frances could not keep from smiling.

"I am sure he is much handsomer than Captain Vinen," continued Kate, laughing in her turn.

"That may easily be, Kate. I never thought Captain Vinen handsome," said Frances, who felt that she would not exchange Captain Vinen's plain, sensible-looking features for all the manly beauty the whole world contained. "If I were inclined to be

disputatious, I might ask in what beauty—animal beauty—Kate, consists?”

“Why, I should say it consists in whatever gives pleasure to the senses. For instance, a look at a pleasing picture is beautiful, because it always gives me pleasure. When I hear a nightingale singing on a fine summer’s night, I feel that the melody I listen to is beautiful, because it charms another exquisite sense. Talking of nightingales, it reminds me of ‘Sunnyside,’ and to ask about Agatha Coulson—is she at home, Frances?”

“She has been here every week during your illness,” said Frances. “I don’t think Agatha looks happy.”

“I suppose her mother wishes her to marry that Mr. Briscoe, and Agatha does not like him. I wish she and our brother would make a match of it,” Kate added.

“So do I, Kate. I have not the slightest doubt in the world Agatha would make an excellent wife.”

“What would our stately friend Mrs. Coul-

sen say to that, eh, Frances? Her son-in-law would never be a favourite."

"Why, my dear."

"I can't give you my reason for thinking so, but I am sure he would not. William has too much of the unyielding sturdiness of the oak to endeavour to please those for whom he has no respect."

"Do you think he does not respect Mrs. Coulson?"

"I don't think, I am sure he does not. He does not respect her as he does Mrs. Vinen or you, Frances. Agatha is a very different character."

Frances made no objection to this observation, and Kate plunged into an entirely different subject.

"Wilding and I have this morning been settling how our house is to be furnished, and he has agreed to everything I proposed. He wanted to throw the conservatory into the drawing-room, but I objected, and he agreed to let the room remain as it is."

"I thought you were so fond of flowers, Kate?"

"So I am in their proper place—the greenhouse or the garden."

"What would Sophia have done without the plants in her sitting-room?"

"That's quite different. I would not object to have flowers in the room if I had an invalid who was unable to walk out into the garden to see them in their natural place. I am sure dear Sophia has had many hours of innocent enjoyment from tending her fuchsias and geraniums. I hope I shall see her tomorrow, Frances."

"If you don't make too free with your strength to-day, Kate, by talking too much. I think you have sat quite long enough for the first time," said Frances.

"I should like to sit another quarter of an hour," pleaded the invalid.

Her sister granted the request.

As soon as the quarter of an hour expired she lay down again and soon fell asleep,

undisturbed by either care or sorrow, for her cup of happiness was filled to the brim.

The next morning Kate was wheeled into Sophia's room, but as Frances had told her how very much her sister was changed, she did not betray the emotion that might otherwise have been anticipated. Sophia, however, felt Kate's hand tremble as she sat with it clasped in her own, and Kate knew that her eyes were filled with tears.

"I have grown much weaker since I last saw you, my dear Kate," said Sophia, after a long silence, "but going back to Braidsworth will restore me."

Kate struggled in vain to speak calmly, and Frances came to her relief.

"Do you think Kate much altered, Sophia?" asked Frances.

"Not much," said her sister, kissing Kate's beautiful forehead. "Even Wilding could not grumble at the ravages usually attendant upon beauty after a lengthened illness."

"I dare say William thinks she cannot be

spoiled," said Frances. "I suppose our brother will be at Braidsworth to-day?"

"He said he should when he went away. Do you know, Kate, we are all going back to 'The Rookery?'"

"Yes, Frances named it to me. How happy we shall all be at the change," she said, with emotion.

"I have been very happy in this comfortable little house," was Sophia's reply, glancing round affectionately at her pictures, and flowers, and birds, "so happy that I almost regret leaving it even for the sunny parlour at 'The Rookery.'"

"That's positive rebellion, Sophia," exclaimed Kate, quickly. "I remember how you used to love that south parlour."

"So I do still, Kate; but that does not prevent my liking this room also. Look! I have the December number of the 'Edinburgh,' and the last new novel on the table, waiting for my perusal. Then I have William, with his life and bustle, and Frances

with her calm quiet to cheer me. I have only to ask one of you to wheel me to that window and I see a large town with its thousands of pulses beating with strong English life, opened out before me."

"You certainly cannot see Bradford from the bay window of 'The Rookery,' said Kate, "but you have charming views of the country all round, sister."

"And William's foundry chimney, when I want to think of the toiling millions around me," added Sophia, "I feel pretty certain our brother will succeed."

"Who would ever have thought of his connecting himself with such a man as Simpkin," laughed Kate.

"I wish there were thousands more like Mr. Simpkin," said Frances, with whom the sturdy ironfounder was a great favourite. "Mr. Simpkin is a real, practical, sensible fellow."

"I quite agree with you, Frances," rejoined Sophia. "I am sure he will be an acquisi-

tion to William in his business. He is a man of experience and great energy."

"Whatever shall we do with his wife?" asked Kate, still laughing. "I don't imagine that either of you can say very much in her favour."

"Well, at any rate, if we cannot say much in her favour, we need say nothing against her," said Frances; "nor need we be upon terms of great intimacy; she has her family, and we have our domestic duties also, Kate."

"There is a carriage at the door," exclaimed Kate, who, from where she sat, could see into the street, "and, if I am not mistaken, it is Agatha Coulson who is getting out."

"Has she anyone with her, Kate?" Sophia asked.

"No one but the coachman. How ill she looks."

Frances could not restrain a sigh as she thought of Agatha's mental sufferings. She could almost have wished both Mr. Briscoe and Mrs. Coulson dead and buried.

As Miss Coulson entered the room, Frances perceived how grave and almost sad she appeared. She complained of violent head-ache, but she did her best to look cheerful, and, after a time, in some degree succeeded. Her mother and Mr. Briscoe had gone to Longford for the day, and being left at home, she had come over to enquire after Sophia and Kate.

Frances thought it strange that Mrs. Coulson should leave her at home; but she was quite aware that their tastes were totally different, so she made no comment, and Miss Coulson continued, addressing her remarks to Kate.

“If I had not known how ill you have been, Kate, I should not have guessed it; you seem so very happy, and have recovered your good looks wonderfully.”

“I have had kind good nurses during my illness, their attention has preserved my good looks, and my happiness just at this moment is increased by Frances telling us we are all going back to Braidsworth, and—”

"To 'The Rookery,' I hope," said Miss Coulson.

"Yes."

Agatha's face brightened for a moment at this news.

"Is Mr. Gladstone going to resume the foundry?" she asked.

"Yes," returned Frances. "It has been all arranged for him to recommence business." Frances looked the picture of happiness as she communicated the intelligence, and Agatha envied her feelings.

"I am going to drive to Braidsworth, Frances," said Miss Coulson, shortly after. "You look so pale, that I think if Sophia and Kate will spare you for a couple of hours, the air will do you good. I will bring you safely back again. Will you go?"

"I should enjoy the drive very much, but I do not like leaving my sisters," replied Frances.

"Oh! don't mind us," said Sophia and Kate, in a breath.

And Frances's feeble objections being overruled, she was soon sitting beside Agatha in the pony carriage.

"I am delighted to hear that you are returning to 'The Rookery,'" said Agatha, her spirits much improved. "It is only a pleasant drive from 'Sunnyside,' and I shall be glad to visit you often to talk over old times."

In a moment a sudden terror seemed to have seized her.

Frances perceived the change, and asked if her friend felt ill.

"Not ill, but sick at heart, Frances, when I remember how soon I shall have to leave 'Sunnyside.'"

"When you marry Mr. Briscoe," Frances said, innocently, as she fancied that event was what her friend alluded to, "I suppose you will go a long distance from all your friends, Agatha."

The look Agatha turned upon her as she said this, puzzled her very much. Her face was exceedingly pale and her lips tightly com-

pressed, as if she was suffering considerable pain.

“I will never marry Mr. Briscoe, Frances,” she said, after a minute. “I would starve rather!”

“This accounts for Mr. Briscoe and Mrs. Coulson going to Longford without her,” thought Frances, a new light beginning to dawn upon her.

“I suppose you are aware,” said Agatha, with a bitter smile, “that if I do not marry that odious man in the course of the coming spring, the greater portion of my fortune will go from me ; and from being Lady of the Manor of ‘Sunnyside,’ I shall dwindle down to something very poor and humble in comparison. Everyone in the neighbourhood knows that, Frances.”

“I have heard something of the kind, Agatha. It was a very absurd will for any man to make.”

“Perhaps so,” replied Agatha, “but I sup-

pose the motives for the strangeness of the will were what the testator considered best."

"Don't you think you could, in time, love Mr. Briscoe?" asked her companion.

"Never!" she exclaimed, emphatically. "He has no more love for me than I have for him."

"And yet he would marry you!" said Frances, in great astonishment.

"Certainly. He would marry me for my money," answered Agatha.

"You love some one else, Agatha?" said Frances, in a state of bewilderment very unusual with her. "If you did not love another would you not marry Mr. Briscoe?"

"Never!" was Agatha's somewhat sorrowful reply. "Sometimes my mother cries and almost frightens me with her picture of the poverty we shall have to endure."

"And you feel inclined to yield, Agatha?" said Frances.

"Never, my dear Frances! I had rather

live upon fifty pounds a-year. Leaving 'Sunnyside' is what I most dread," and her head sunk upon her breast.

Frances, for a wonder, knew not what to say, so remained silent.

"Everyone is against me," went on Agatha, after a long pause, and looking up; "even Mr. Banks is in a bitter passion at the very idea of my quitting 'Sunnyside.'"

"Never mind what he says, Agatha," said Frances, recovering her accustomed cool manner. "Let your own heart decide your actions. If that tells you Mr. Briscoe can never be loved by you, then bear and brave all patiently; the greatest trouble will have an end."

"Is that your brother coming towards us?" asked Agatha, who had just caught sight of Mr. Gladstone.

"Yes, and Mr. Simpkin with him. Did we tell you of William's new partner?" asked Frances.

"A Bradford gentleman, I suppose."

In a couple of minutes the gentlemen came up, and Mr. Gladstone took off his hat, and wiped his forehead, for cold as the morning was, he had walked so fast that he was quite hot from the exertion.

"Good morning," said Agatha ; "I have coaxed Frances to come out for a drive."

"It is a long time since I last saw you, Miss Coulson," answered Mr. Gladstone, shaking hands with her. "Allow me to introduce my new partner, Mr. Simpkin."

Agatha bowed to Mr. Simpkin, and went on talking to William.

"I have called regularly once a week during Kate's illness to enquire after her."

"And I was always absent, I suppose," said William, his hand on the carriage door. "You know we are coming back to 'The Rookery?'"

"Frances told me so half an hour ago. I hope you will prosper, gentlemen," and she bowed to Mr. Simpkin, who returned the compliment in his usual blunt, hearty manner.

“ We are going to call on the Vinens,”
Agatha added, addressing Mr. Gladstone.

“ I very much regret not being able to accompany you,” was William’s reply, who saw by Simpkin’s look that time was precious. “ I will ride over to ‘ Sunnyside ’ the very first afternoon I can manage to get away,” and in another minute they parted, each in a separate direction.

CHAPTER XI.

AFTER tea that evening, Frances recounted everything that had passed between herself and her friend Miss Coulson, with regard to Mr. Briscoe. Her brother listened attentively, but did not make a remark. As soon as she had finished he bade her tell him all over again, cross-questioning her upon almost every particular.

“Did Miss Coulson ever confide in you before this morning?” demanded her brother.

“Never.”

“Then, it’s nothing more, perhaps, than a passing dislike, Frances,” and his brow again became clouded. “She and Mr. Briscoe may have quarrelled, as lovers frequently do.”

“That is not the case, I am certain. Agatha distinctly declared that nothing should tempt her to marry Mr. Briscoe.”

William arose and paced up and down the room. He was violently agitated. Two pictures appeared before his eyes : one dark, gloomy, and shadowed ; the other—his heart bounded with a wild sort of joy as he mentally gazed upon the other—a vision of bliss, a wife’s love cheering his sinking spirits.

He stopped abruptly before his sister, saying, hurriedly—

“Frances, I love Agatha Coulson !”

His colour rose as he made the avowal, and became deeper as his companion answered—

“I am glad to hear you say so, dear brother, as I am convinced Agatha has long loved you.”

“Are you ?”

“Yes.”

He threw himself into a chair, and shaded his face from the fire-light and his sister’s anxious gaze.

"Yes," continued Frances. "I could read the deepest feelings of her heart this morning."

By this time her brother had almost schooled himself to resume his usual caution, and made no remark.

"Agatha is a sweet girl, William," Frances said, after a prolonged silence.

"No doubt of it, sister," was the quiet rejoinder.

"Gentle, and yet firm ; cheerful, yet calm," she continued.

"I admire all her good qualities," he said, turning his face away.

"She is resolute ; and yet I tremble for her, William."

"Why, my dear ?" he asked, darting a quick searching glance at her face.

"The ordeal she has to encounter is a terrible one for a warm-hearted girl," replied Frances.

"The loss of her fortune ?"

"That would be nothing under ordinary

circumstances; but her position is by no means pleasant to be placed in. I believe she is really attached to her mother, who seems to consider the possession of 'Sunnyside' of much greater consequence than her daughter's future happiness. If Agatha marries Mr. Briscoe, she secures the estate to her family for ever."

"I quite agree with you, that Mrs. Coulson's love is an utterly selfish feeling," said her brother.

"But Agatha's love is the reverse of selfishness," was Frances's rejoinder.

After a pause, Mr. Gladstone asked—

"Did Agatha say anything when you parted from her?"

"Not much. She had sent the groom forward with the carriage, and we walked the last mile or so almost in silence. At the top of the hill she embraced and kissed me, and then it was, brother, that I saw tears in her eyes as she said good-bye."

"And I suppose, Frances, you had a good

cry all to yourself as you came back to Braidsworth," said William, smiling.

"I need not tell that. I called on Sarah Crisp and old Mrs. Jobson," said Frances, smiling in her turn.

Her brother cared not to hear anything about Sarah Crisp or Mrs. Jobson. He wished her to go on with the only theme that at the moment could have the slightest charm for him; but Frances, getting sleepy, said she would go to bed.

"I shall be engaged the whole of to-morrow with my new partner," said her brother.

"Good night," said Frances, leaving the room. William also retired.

A couple of hours passed before he sought his pillow; he knew he could not sleep, and it was no use going to bed until he could do so. The table he was sitting at was covered with papers, and in course of time the papers were covered with figures. The problem he was trying to solve was apparently a most difficult one, for he studied it over and over

again, until his lamp gave signs of leaving him in the dark.

“ Pshaw ! what an idiot I am ! ” he muttered, throwing down his pen. “ Fool ! to try to reduce the uncertainties of this life to a mathematical problem, and to arrange beforehand for ills that may never happen. God will provide all, and ‘ sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. ’ ”

[CHAPTER XII.

MR. GLADSTONE did not make his appearance at the foundry the next day, and Mr. Simpkin sent to enquire during the forenoon where he was, as there was a large amount of writing to be done that no one but William could execute.

Frances saw the messenger, and sent word to Mr. Simpkin that her brother had left home for the country upon urgent business, but would be back at night. Frances suspected where he was gone, but she considered it was no business of hers, or of Mr. Simpkin's either, so she kept her own counsel.

Mr. Gladstone borrowed a horse from livery

stables near early in the morning, and rode off to "Sunnyside," considering that the sooner Agatha Coulson decided his fate and her own the better. Frances had told him enough the evening before to kindle hope within him. She had said Agatha did not love Mr. Briscoe, and he knew he could rely on his sister's judgment more readily than upon his own.

The morning was very gloomy, and lowering clouds threatened rain—certainly not a bright prospect for a romantic lover. But Mr. Gladstone was resolved to know his fate, and could not bear the delay of an hour.

He dismounted at the village inn, intending to walk to the house.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Gladstone," said the landlord, touching his cap, "I thought you'd quite forgot the way to 'Sunnyside.'"

"I have been so very busy lately, and obliged to remain entirely at home. How are Mrs. and Miss Coulson?"

"Mrs. Coulson is much as usual, sir, but

the young lady does not look at all well. That Mr. Briscoe, who is so often there, seems to be no favourite with her," said the landlord.

"Is Mr. Briscoe there now?" asked William, who knew very well he was.

"Oh! he's always there, sir, and Miss Coulson thoroughly hates him, if I'm any judge. It's a pity such a charming young lady should be doomed to marry such a curmudgeon," said the landlord.

"I thought Miss Coulson was looking remarkably well the last time I saw her," said Mr. Gladstone, carelessly.

"It's only lately she's been looking so low-spirited and sadly. Why, sir, the rosy colour she used to have in her cheek is there no longer, and she's grown so thin, poor young lady, that it makes my heart bleed to see her. I'm afraid I'm detaining you, Mr. Gladstone."

"No, not at all. How is your good lady? I hope she has not lost the roses from her

cheeks, nor her comely stoutness," rejoined William, smiling.

"Oh, not she, sir," said the honest landlord, with a cheerful smile. "It would be a shame if she had, for she has nothing to fret about."

"Any addition to her family since I was last here?" asked William shily.

"One, Mr. Gladstone. My wife is a wonderful woman, sir."

"She is, indeed. I will call and see the babe as I return. Pray tell her I enquired for her," and William walked on.

The woman at the lodge greeted him with a curtsy as he passed through the gate and walked up the shrubbery, beginning to think, with somewhat shrinking courage, that Agatha would have to resign the grand home, looking so beautiful and fair, even in winter, if she accepted him. Then a still soft hope arose, whispering in his heart "Love can turn a cottage into a palace, whilst dislike makes a prison of a palace."

This hope soothed his anxiety, and he walked boldly on.

The footman who opened the door informed him that Mrs. Coulson had not yet left her room, as she was not quite well.

"Is Miss Coulson at home?" William enquired.

"Yes, sir," was the reply, "she's alone in the breakfast-room; pray walk in, sir."

The moment William entered, Miss Coulson came forward to greet him with a trembling welcome that made his heart beat almost audibly.

"I hope nothing has happened, Mr. Gladstone," she said, as soon as he had seated himself on the couch beside her. "Your sisters, I trust, are all well?"

"Quite well, I thank you. How is Mrs. Coulson?"

"Not very well this morning. She has a headache, brought on by exceeding nervousness. She felt so weak when she awoke that Mr. Briscoe has ridden over

to Braidsworth to request Dr. Smith to call."

"Miss Coulson," said her companion, plunging wildly into the subject that lay heavily at his heart, "I am come over to 'Sunnyside' this morning in consequence of a conversation you had with my sister Frances respecting Mr. Briscoe."

"I do not recollect," said Agatha, who forgot everything in the momentary excitement and terror such a speech caused.

"Compose yourself, dear Miss Coulson," said William, gathering courage as he proceeded. "My sister Frances has told me all your conversation. I trust she has forfeited no confidence by acquainting me with circumstances which have raised the highest hopes in my heart?"

He expected an outburst of tears, for he fancied women always did cry in such cases, but he was disappointed. It must be confessed her face was very white, and her lips trembled as she tried to frame words to

answer him, but failed to express her feelings.

"I never knew until yesterday," said William, with impetuosity, "that you were not engaged to Mr. Briscoe. I have feared for a very long time that you had given him your love—or at least that he was your accepted lover. I must have been blind not to have seen how you despised and loathed him, that you would brave poverty—even want—rather than ally yourself to such a man. I have been like a man walking in his sleep, or like one condemned to a life of hopeless misery. I have just awoken, Agatha, and my first use of this awakening is to fly to you. I am poor, Agatha, but I can work, and, I hope, win wealth for my bride, whilst I regain the position I so unfortunately lost."

She tried to tell him she knew he would, but her voice failed her again, and her companion went on—

"I have loved you fondly and truly for years. I cannot recall the time when your

image was not associated in my mind with all that I deemed beautiful and amiable in woman. Oh! Agatha, you cannot know how many wakeful nights the idea of losing you has cost me, nor how the slightest words from your dear lips have sustained my fainting heart when racked with passion at the thought of your preferring another."

"I never preferred another, Mr. Gladstone," said his companion, in a low voice, as William took her hand. "I have always utterly detested Mr. Briscoe."

"I believe it, Agatha. What a senseless idiot I have been. What a blind fool I have been, torturing my heart because I was too proud to tell you my love. Thank Heaven! Frances opened my eyes to your feeling respecting Mr. Briscoe."

"Or rather my want of feeling," observed Agatha, with a smile.

"Just so," said William; "and you really prefer a poor foundry man to the Reverend Mr. Briscoe and his golden treasures?"

"I do," said Agatha, returning the pressure of his hand. "I think I like you," she added, looking archly into his face, while her own was covered with smiles and blushes, "and I am quite sure I detest Mr. Briscoe."

"A very sensible distinction," said William, looking affectionately at her up-turned face. "What a revulsion has come over my feelings within the last three hours. I came from home full of doubts and fears, my very heart sinking within me, and now—"

His further remarks were interrupted by the return of Mr. Briscoe, who not being aware that Miss Coulson had a visitor, entered the room without ceremony. He was completely staggered when he observed Mr. Gladstone sitting with the lady whom he had long considered as his own private property. He stared rudely and haughtily at William, who returned his rudeness with an equally haughty look; but what astonished the reverend gentleman more than all was, when Agatha rose to leave the room, to hear her say to Mr. Gladstone as she passed—

“Tell him all, dear William; and then come and walk with me in the garden.”

Mr. Briscoe looked as haughtily as it was possible for any clergyman to look. Mr. Gladstone stood perfectly calm and self-possessed before him.

A dark scowl overspread the handsome face of the haughty man, and a deep flush made him appear at the moment, so much superior in physical beauty to his companion, as he said—

“May I ask whom I have the honour to receive during Mrs. Coulson’s absence?”

William knew it was neither Mr. Briscoe’s nor Mrs. Coulson’s house, but he let the observation pass, and told his name. He suspected Mr. Briscoe would ignore having seen him before, and he was not mistaken in the supposition.

“May I ask your business, Mr. Gladstone, if it will not be considered too inquisitive,” said the clergyman, with cold politeness.

“ You can scarcely be ignorant of that, Mr. Briscoe, unless you are determined to be wilfully blind,” said William, with great calmness. “ I have Miss Coulson’s sanction for informing you that she has this morning promised to become my wife.”

In spite of his habitual pride Mr. Briscoe turned pale, and William was prepared for the burst of incredulity and scorn that followed.

“ That’s an infamous lie, a pitiful delusion,” he cried.

Mr. Gladstone made no reply ; he knew his strength, and was determined that, in that house, he would not suffer himself to be betrayed into an unseemly exhibition of passion. He would punish Mr. Briscoe at some future time for this insult.

William’s silence irritated Mr. Briscoe beyond all endurance, and throwing himself into an easy chair, he commanded Mr. Gladstone to leave the room.

William took a seat opposite the irate man. It was his turn now, and he did not miss the opportunity.

“Your language, Mr. Briscoe, is unworthy a gentleman, and more especially a clergyman; but I forgive you, sir,” he said. “You have called me a liar, and I demand your proof of such an assertion.”

“Well, then Mr.—what’s your name?”

“Gladstone.”

“I can prove that you are not telling the truth. Miss Coulson is, and has been for a long time, engaged to become my wife. Do you not know, sir, she loses her property, with the exception of a paltry annuity, if she does not marry me; that ‘Sunnyside’ goes away from her; that, in fact, she will be a beggar? She can’t do anything else than marry me.”

William smiled, but made no remark, irritating Mr. Briscoe still more, who went on—

“Do you think she would be such an idiot as to forego such a chance?”

“You are offering a great indignity to Miss

Coulson, sir ; and you know you are deceiving yourself when you make so shameful a remark. I cannot think so lightly of your penetration into the character of the lady you would seek to make your wife, as to say she would barter the happiness of her whole life were there a thousand Sunnysides depending upon her choice."

"I repeat, sir, that the assertions you make are all lies," exclaimed the reverend gentleman still more wrathfully. "Do you think, sir, that Miss Coulson is so great a fool, whatever you may be. Do you think, sir, the girl would break her mother's heart, as well as lose 'Sunnyside' altogether ; while it goes entirely away from the family to a charity, unless she marries before she is twenty-one."

William felt his temper rising, but he restrained his feelings, and permitted his adversary to go on.

Mr. Briscoe mistook his silence for alarm, and continued with a triumphant air—

"I beg to say, sir, that I know Miss Coulson too well to doubt for a moment what she will do. She will not break her mother's heart, I am sure."

William did not think Mrs. Coulson's heart made of brittle material; but he kept the notion to himself.

"Besides, I love Miss Coulson very much; quite as much as any rational woman could expect to be loved. She has been aware of my sentiments for nearly two years, and has never shown the slightest repugnance to the match, that I am aware of."

"Well," said Mr. Gladstone, rising, "I have only told you the plain fact, that Agatha Coulson is my affianced wife."

"She will never be such a fool as to make herself a beggar for any man," said Mr. Briscoe, in a coarse way.

"Time will show, sir," answered Mr. Gladstone with calmness. "Miss Coulson has, in my opinion, treated you with greater candour and patience than you have deserved. There

was not the slightest necessity for her to inform you of her intentions."

"That's, no doubt, very fine; but let those laugh who win. You will see Miss Coulson will be my wife yet," retorted Mr. Briscoe, as Mr. Gladstone went out of the room.

William related to Agatha everything that he could remember of the interview, as they walked through the woods—those woods that were so soon, perhaps, to be hers no longer. He did not omit that part in which Mr. Briscoe had avowed his belief that Agatha would sacrifice her future happiness from a feeling of filial duty.

"I shrink, I confess, from telling poor mamma, dear William," said Agatha, as he drew her closer to him, and kissed her pale cheek, "and yet the truth must come from me."

"Shall I see her, dearest? I will do anything you wish," said William, kindly.

"No, no! I will tell her. Do you think she will feel it very much, William?"

“At first, I have no doubt she will; but I don’t think the regret will last,” was William’s answer. “You would not be justified in bartering the happiness of your whole life, Agatha, even to purchase your mother’s approval. If she loves you, she will rejoice in seeing you happy.”

“Mr. Briscoe always talks of my duty to mamma,” said Agatha, nervously. “He is always preaching upon the duty and self-denial of children to their parents.”

“Self-denial is unquestionably a holy and beautiful thing, dearest, when it is absolutely necessary, and when children can exercise that self-denial without committing a wrong,” rejoined her lover; “but in your case it is complete folly to mention it. I do not think ‘Sunnyside’ necessary to Mrs. Coulson’s happiness, and if it is, she ought to be ashamed of the weakness!”

“She has lived here so many years, and has considered me so entirely the mistress of this charming place, that it will be a great

shock when I undeceive her. But I will not shrink from telling her, William. If she is violent I will send for Dr. Vinen."

"And me, dearest."

"Yes, and you," said Agatha, with a faint smile. "We had better return now, I think, for I must see mamma before dinner."

"Don't let Mr. Briscoe bully you, dearest," said William, as she was about to leave him. "Remember Mr. Banks and Dr. Vinen are your guardians, and are bound to protect you till I can save them the trouble, and mind, my love, you send some one for me, should you find Mr. Briscoe unmanageable."

"Entirely rely on me, William," was her calm, proud answer, as he kissed her again and again, until at last Agatha was obliged to release herself from his embrace, and run off as fast as she could towards the house.

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CHAPTER XIII.

MISS COULSON was quite prepared for the violent storm of indignation and wrath that awaited her in her mother's dressing-room. Feeling that it was better to get the explanation over as soon as possible, and knowing that Mr. Briscoe would have announced her "*shameless intentions*" long ere this, she proceeded immediately to Mrs. Coulson's room, and knocked gently at the door.

"Come in," said her mother's voice, and Agatha entered in a state of nervousness, that for more than a minute deprived her of the power of speech.

Mrs. Coulson was sitting on a couch near

an open window. It was Agatha's usual habit, after kissing her mother to take a seat on a stool beside her ; but on this occasion she did neither, but waited near the fire-place till her mother spoke again.

"Why do you stand there, child?" said Mrs. Coulson, in a harsh voice, looking sternly towards her. "You have not kissed me this morning, Agatha."

"I cannot kiss you yet, mother," Agatha began.

"Not kiss me ! What do you mean ? Are you not well this morning, child ?"

Agatha moved to the side of the couch, and stood with her hands folded upon her breast.

"I know, dearest mamma, that you love me better than any one else in the world," she said, struggling to speak calmly.

"Of course I do, my love. What a strange speech."

"Since papa died," said the daughter, in a low voice, "we have been everything to each other, have we not ?"

“To be sure we have, silly child; but don’t talk in that way, it makes me nervous.”

“If you had to choose between ‘Sunnyside’ and your child, mamma,” said Agatha, with a sad smile, “which would you select?”

Mrs. Coulson raised herself and looked keenly and long at her daughter ere she ventured a reply.

“Agatha!” she at length said, in a hollow voice, “there is some wretched jugglery going on. What in the name of fortune do you mean?”

“I mean, mother, that I dare not marry Mr. Briscoe. I do not love him. I never did love him. Never could love a man whose tastes are so dissimilar to my own;” and she put her arm round her mother’s neck.

“But you must marry him, my dear girl,” said the mother, kissing her fevered cheek. “You will not drive me away from the home I have lived in for so many years. You will not break my heart, Agatha?”

“Mother! mother!” was her only answer,

and the heart-breaking tone in which the words were uttered almost turned the cold-hearted mother from her purpose.

"Sit up, child, and listen to me," cried her mother in no very gentle voice; and the daughter obeyed, trembling and pale.

"You are aware that my strange idiotic cousin left you a certain sum per year till you came of age, but when you attained that period you were to have the whole estates unconditionally, excepting only one proviso—that you married, with your guardians' consent, before your twenty-first birthday." Mrs. Coulson paused.

"Well, mamma."

"Expecting that you would fulfil the terms of the will, I have been spending a larger sum yearly than was allowed, and am considerably in debt," continued Mrs. Coulson, greatly agitated.

"Oh! mamma!" exclaimed the daughter, with a horrified look.

"I am ashamed to own it to you, my love,

but it is a fact," said Mrs. Coulson, with a blush. "Mr. Banks has advanced the money from time to time, and on looking over the accounts I see it considerably exceeds five thousand pounds."

Agatha almost fainted, whilst her mother proceeded in an apologetic tone—

"You know, Agatha, how generous Mr. Briscoe is. Nothing can exceed his kindness, and he has promised faithfully that the day he is married to you he will give me the money to repay Mr. Banks, who is really annoying me very much about it. You will not object to this, my sweet love?"

"Oh! mamma! you will kill me," cried Agatha, looking at her mother in a bewildered and excited state, that for a moment frightened Mrs. Coulson.

"Is what you have told me, mamma, quite true?" asked the suffering daughter the next moment, as a doubt of her mother's veracity crossed her mind.

"Quite true, my dearest child."

“And Mr. Banks is urgent for the money?” questioned Agatha.

“Yes. I will bring you his letter,” answered Mrs. Coulson, trying to rise.

“Mother, sit still,” said the daughter. “God help me!”

“My dear child!” began Mrs. Coulson.

Agatha rose to her feet, and walked rapidly up and down the room, murmuring “God help me!” with heart-rending sobs, at intervals, breaking the silence—sobs bursting from her crushed and despairing heart.

“Mother,” she cried, “Mr. Banks must be paid, for I owe the debt; it was incurred for my sake. It was your love for me that induced you to borrow the money. Oh! mother!” and her voice faltered, “it was a cruel kindness.”

She sat down and looked into the garden, and there she saw Mr. Briscoe walking leisurely. A cold shivering came over her; she could not bear to look at him at such a moment.

"I will write to Mr. Banks, and ask him to come to 'Sunnyside.' He is my guardian, and manages the accounts," said Agatha.

Mrs. Coulson was awe-struck at such a straightforward proceeding, and tried to turn Agatha from her purpose by every argument in her power, but her daughter remained firm.

"Agatha, my child, I shall die of shame," she said, piteously.

"We must look at our difficulties with firmness," replied the daughter. "Mr. Banks will be with us early to-morrow morning I am sure."

"Well, my love, you must do as you please. I am sure you will be a good girl and marry Mr. Briscoe, and as he has promised to pay this debt you will get rid of your difficulties and anxieties at once. Banks has worried me fearfully, and I must say acted like a brute."

"If you had told me earlier your misery might have been spared. Mine is to come. God help me!"

“ Do not be uneasy, my love ; Mr. Briscoe is an honourable man.”

Agatha made no reply, but her pale face and look of thoughtfulness, from which her mother had not the courage to arouse her, showed plainly enough how great were her mental sufferings.

After a considerable pause she got up, and without a word went to her room to write letter to Mr. Banks.

CHAPTER XIV.

AGATHA wrote three letters, one to Mr. Banks, a second to William Gladstone, and the third to her other guardian, Dr. Vinen. She rang the bell for the footman, who immediately answered the summons.

"Take these three letters. Deliver the one to Mr. Banks first.

"Is there any answer to wait for, ma'am?" asked the man.

"No."

The footman left the room and Agatha threw herself on the sofa, covering herself with a thick travelling cloak, for there was no fire. She had no intention of sleeping, but

the quiet, she thought, would enable her to think on her situation and nerve her for the coming misery.

Mr. Briscoe dined alone that day, for Mrs. Coulson did not venture to leave her chamber. She was in a state between humiliation and terror. Like most cruel, selfish people, now that her troubles were gathering fast around, her mind became feeble, and she wanted courage to brave the worst.

Agatha's greatest trouble was the large sum owing to Mr. Banks ; had it been less than half it would have been more than sufficient to frighten the stoutest heart.

In her letter to William Gladstone she had fully explained to him the position in which she was placed by her mother, and entreated him, for both their sakes, to learn to think of her only as a friend, as now they could never hope to marry. At the same time she declared she would never be united to Mr. Briscoe.

Poor girl, what sad painful thoughts passed through her mind as she lay apparently quite

forgotten by everyone, in that cold room, her cheeks wet with tears, and her heart almost bursting under the perplexities and misery by which she was surrounded. At one moment praying for God's help and the next murmuring William Gladstone's name in tones of affection as she recalled the bliss of that moment when all reserve between them was cast aside, and they spoke unreservedly to each other the words of undying love.

"I will never marry," she said aloud, "for though my heart has chosen William for my husband, I will not weigh down his noble energies with long years of hopeless struggling against adverse fortune. I cannot let him impoverish himself for my sake."

Tears, tears, nothing but tears followed these imaginings.

Then she thought how she should meet and what she should say to Mr. Banks. At one moment she trembled, the next she became strangely calm. Then she wondered how her mother was passing the time, and whether

she had dined. She could eat nothing herself, and when the servant came and knocked at the door and told her Mr. Briscoe had desired her to say dinner was on the table, she sent back the message that he must dine by himself, she needed nothing but a glass of water.

In this manner the day passed, and in utter weariness of spirit she went to sit beside her mother, as she was accustomed to do when Mrs. Coulson was unable to leave her room. On her way she met Mr. Briscoe.

"You look pale, Agatha," he said, in his proud, cold voice, as she attempted to pass him, with a slight inclination of the head, which he prevented by placing himself before her. "I don't think you are well."

"I have not been very well to-day, Mr. Briscoe," she replied, in her usual sweet tones, for she would not speak harshly, much as she disliked him.

"Then I think you should send for Dr. Smith. Allow me to despatch a messenger

for him; that idle footman is reading a book in the housekeeper's room and could go at once."

"I do not wish Dr. Smith to be sent for, Mr. Briscoe, and I am very glad the footman is so profitably employed," said Agatha, with some asperity, for Mr. Briscoe made a practice of acting as common informer against the "Sunnyside" servants, in which employment Mrs. Coulson secretly encouraged him.

"I've half a mind to tell her I'll leave 'Sunnyside' to-morrow," he thought, "it would bring her to my feet in no time."

"It is very cold here, Mr. Briscoe," said Agatha, drawing her shawl closer around her, "pray allow me to pass, sir."

He bit his lip, and allowed her to proceed, thinking what a vixen she was, and half doubting whether it would be safe to marry her after all. Before he could satisfy himself on the point she was gone, and he returned to the dining-room, to indulge in a few more glasses of port wine.

"I thought I should not see you again, Agatha," said Mrs. Coulson peevishly, as her daughter entered the room. "What have you been doing all these hours?"

"Not much, I'm afraid, mamma. Shall I read to you?"

"No, thank you; where is Mr. Briscoe?"

"In the dining-room, I believe."

"The housemaid told me he dined by himself," said Mrs. Coulson, who had neither the sense nor the delicacy to banish the subject. "I hope that is not true, Agatha."

"It is quite true, mamma," said her daughter, firmly. "Whilst Mr. Briscoe remains at 'Sunnyside' he will be obliged to dine alone, unless you get sufficiently well to join him."

"I am dreadfully annoyed, Agatha; what will the servants think of us?" asked the mother.

"I cannot tell what they will think, mamma. Mr. Briscoe must shorten his visit if you wish to avoid gossip," rejoined the daughter.

Mrs. Coulson shrugged her shoulders, but did not venture to make further remonstrance; for the events of the afternoon were still fresh in her memory, and she trembled at the thoughts of another scene, so she complained of illness with the air of a martyr.

"I really think I am worse instead of better, my dear," she said peevishly. "I am quite sure Dr. Smith does not understand my complaint."

"He is generally considered extremely clever, mamma; but if you wish it, I will send to Bradford for the most popular physician there," said Agatha.

"Oh! my love, we cannot afford to do that," cried Mrs. Coulson. "No, I must go on suffering and dying by inches, rather than incur such an expense."

An indignant blush suffused Agatha's cheek, at her mother's petty malice.

"Your life, mamma, is too precious to reckon up the cost of a physician's visit. I

will send the footman to Bradford to-morrow morning."

"I will not allow any such thing, child. Why it would cost fifteen or twenty pounds!" exclaimed Mrs. Coulson, who affected to be much alarmed.

Miss Coulson did not press the matter further, not thinking her mother so ill as she represented herself to be.

"I pray that I may live over the meeting with Mr. Banks to-morrow, Agatha, the disgrace is enough to kill me," she said after another pause.

Her daughter had no doubt she would, knowing from experience how her mother would shelter herself from blame. Whatever was painful in the interview with Mr. Banks she was certain would have to be borne by herself. She neglected to notice her mother's prayer, which was a new source of grievance for Mrs. Coulson.

"Agatha!"

"Well mamma!" was the response.

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"I wish you would cure yourself of that disagreeable habit of not answering people when they speak to you."

"I am very sorry," Agatha said, penitently. "It is getting late mamma, and I am very tired. Shall I read a little to you before I say good night?"

"Not to-night, thank you. Send Sarah to me and go to bed as soon as you choose; there, good night."

Agatha kissed her mother and left the room.

Miss Coulson did not go to bed until it was very late, and when she did her rest was disturbed and broken, for she dreaded the morrow, notwithstanding all her stoicism. From her childhood she had stood in great awe of Mr. Banks, which awe the experience of her maturer years had not been able to efface. Her heart failed her when she thought of the coarse oaths and grim wrath, which she feared would follow the announcement of the course she intended to pursue with regard to Mr. Briscoe.

As is always the case, the night wore away—the day dawned at last, and the time dragged on, varied by the duties of dressing. Then the breakfast was to be got over, and sundry little domestic duties kept her employed until noon approached. Punctually at twelve o'clock Mr. Banks's chaise rolled up the avenue, and seated within in grim state, was seen the somewhat shabby figure of the owner.

"Show Mr. Banks into the dining-room, and carry in luncheon," said Miss Coulson to the footman. "I expect Dr. Vinen shortly, and as soon as he comes request both gentlemen to come to mamma's dressing-room."

After giving these directions she went to Mrs. Coulson's room to tell her Mr. Banks had arrived. Agatha had steeled her heart against the tears, sobs and heart-breaking speeches she knew her mother would inflict upon her, and painful as was the task she had to encounter, she resolved to be composed. Mrs. Coulson's encomiums of Mr. Briscoe only disgusted her.

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"Dear mamma, do keep yourself quiet, it will soon be over," she said in answer to her mother's outpouring of grief. "It is really better that we should act fairly and justly at once, to both Mr. Banks and Mr. Briscoe."

"Mr. Banks is such a brute, my dear, that I quite dread to meet him," sobbed Mrs. Coulson.

"Mr. Banks is an honourable man, mamma, and I am sure he will not sanction any dishonourable arrangement, even to secure his money."

"But Mr. Briscoe loves you very dearly, my child," persisted Mrs. Coulson. "He is in every respect so eligible. Of a good old family, very handsome, and next heir but one to a peerage. You might live to be a marchioness, Agatha."

Miss Coulson could not help smiling at the golden bait held out to her, but it possessed no attraction for her.

In a few minutes the footman appeared to say Mr. Banks and Dr. Vinen would come to

Mrs. Coulson at once, if it was quite agreeable to her.

"Desire the gentlemen to walk up," said Miss Coulson.

"My love! my dear love!" gasped Mrs. Coulson.

"Stay, John. What is the matter, mamma?" cried her daughter, hastening to her side.

"I cannot see them, child," whispered Mrs. Coulson, who really looked ill. "Do go down and explain this dreadful business to them, and make an apology for me."

"Just as you please, mamma. John, go and send some one to sit with Mrs. Coulson whilst I am absent."

In a few minutes Agatha went down to confront Mr. Banks and Dr. Vinen.

As she approached the dining-room door she heard the harsh voice of Mr. Banks in angry dispute with Dr. Vinen, which as may be imagined in no way tended to give her courage or soothe her agitation. She heard an oath and then a loud laugh of triumph, such

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as could proceed from no other throat than that of Mr. Banks. Half repenting her determination, and quite wishing the interview could be postponed, Miss Coulson nerved herself into a calm state, and ventured to enter the room.

CHAPTER XV.

WHEN Miss Coulson appeared before her two guardians, she was pale as death, so pale that even the grim Mr. Banks, who cared little about the gentler sex, expressed a trifling alarm as he grasped her small white hand in his great rough palm.

"Pray be seated, gentlemen," she said, with all her usual graceful ease, even at this very trying moment. "I am sorry mamma is so ill to-day that she cannot possibly see you."

"We can wait, my dear," said Mr. Banks, who suspected that Mrs. Coulson had taken a sulky fit, and would recover presently. "She'll be better afore long."

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"I am afraid not, sir; she is really very ill."

"Pray what does she want with us?" asked Mr. Banks, bluntly. "Can you tell us, Miss Agatha?"

"It relates very much to myself, Mr. Banks," said the trembling girl, watching his shrewd, hard-looking face, with a species of fascination, much as she disliked the sight of the ominous wrinkles that seared it. "You are aware I shall shortly complete my twenty-first birthday."

"I only wish it was to come to-morrow," said Mr. Banks, with grim glee. "I shall never be comfortable till the day arrives."

"Why so?" asked Dr. Vinen, "What can make you so anxious?"

"For a good private reason of my own," replied Mr. Banks.

Dr. Vinen knew nothing about Mrs. Coulson's debt.

"Well, Miss Agatha," said Mr. Banks, regarding her with considerable attention, as

he saw her face become red and white by turns, "that's not all you have to tell us, I suppose, after you've induced us to come up here this cold morning; perhaps it's about that bit of news that Vinen and I know about?"

"I am sorry to say that is the cause of my wishing to see you, gentlemen."

"Sorry! the deuce! I can't see what there is to be sorry about, if I'm right in my conjectures," said Mr. Banks. "Young ladies don't grieve much, I'm thinking, Dr. Vinen, when they are about to send their guardians about their business, and get a handsome husband to replace them. That's what you are thinking about, Miss Agatha, eh?"

"Indeed it is not, Mr. Banks—" she began.

"Stuff and nonsense, my dear, I know better. There is not a gossip between this and Bradford that doesn't know you're going to be married to Mr. Briscoe. I for one won't say you nay to that step."

"I am sorry to undeceive you, Mr. Banks," said Agatha.

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"Yes, undeceive you, sir. I will never marry Mr. Briscoe."

"Damnation!"

"Mr. Banks!" said the Rector.

"I beg your pardon, Dr. Vinen," said Mr. Banks, without taking his gaze from Agatha's face. "Will you repeat that, Miss Coulson?"

"Pray do not try me too much," she said, if possible looking paler than before, and speaking in a very subdued voice. "I am by no means strong, and I fear this interview will prove anything but pleasant to me. I have already told mamma of my determination, Mr. Banks."

"Do you mean to say, then, that it's all true?" he exclaimed, looking more like a wild beast than a human being.

"I assure you, sir, it is quite true," was the reply.

"Upon my word, Mr. Banks, you seem strangely disturbed by Miss Coulson's resolution," said Dr. Vinen, whose calmness

presented a singular contrast to that of his co-guardian's impetuosity.

"And well I may—I have been swindled in the most barefaced manner—infernally plundered. Did your mother tell you, my good girl, that she owes me upwards of five thousand pounds? Did she tell you?" and he literally screamed out the words. "She has all through the affair told me you would certainly marry Mr. Briscoe, and that was her only chance of getting out of my debt."

"I had not the slightest notion that we owed you a single shilling, till yesterday, Mr. Banks," said poor Agatha.

"And you wrote to me directly," he exclaimed, as the idea struck him.

"I did, sir. I was anxious to know my position, and I also wished you to know. I felt I was in duty bound to acquaint you, at the earliest moment, of the circumstances I have already named."

"There was sense in that," growled Banks, whose crusty heart relented at the sight of her

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pale, wistful face and pleading voice ; “ and you want to know what chance you have of paying off nearly six thousand pounds ! ”

“ I do, sir. I could not rest till I saw you.”

“ Old Grey left you ‘ Sunnyside ’ on the express condition that you married Mr. Briscoe, who was his nephew by the sister’s side, before you attained the age of twenty-one,” said old Banks, drily.

“ I am aware of that, sir.”

“ And that unless you marry, you will be obliged to quit ‘ Sunnyside.’ ”

“ I am, sir.”

“ And, comparatively, you will be as poor as a church mouse,” continued Mr. Banks, in a somewhat mollified tone.

“ I am aware I shall have only a very small income.”

“ Most likely be obliged to take a small lodging in Halifax or Bradford, and work to support your mother as well as yourself.”

“ I do, sir.”

"You really hate Mr. Briscoe, are quite determined not to marry him, and are resolved to brave all these miseries," questioned Mr. Banks, looking searchingly into her face.

"I do not hate him, sir, but I dislike him so much that I should never be happy were I to become his wife."

"This is not a mere whim of the moment, is it? or have you disliked Mr. Briscoe for some months?" said Mr. Banks, abruptly.

"I have always disliked him."

The old man looked at Agatha almost admiringly as she spoke. He was beginning to appreciate her unflinching courage. It was quite a new thing to him to see a woman firm, yet calm, when she might have resorted to hysterics.

"But my young friend will not be so entirely poor, Mr. Banks," observed Dr. Vinen. "Mr. Grey provided for her necessities in case she forfeited 'Sunnyside.'"

"Yes, with a paltry annuity," said Mr. Banks, with a grim sneer. "What's five

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hundred a year, sir, compared with 'Sunny-side, that's worth a clear two thousand or thereabouts. Why, it's like throwing gold into the sea, giving up such a fine property."

Mr. Banks looked earnestly into her pale face, expecting to see by its expression that she relented.

Miss Coulson disappointed him : he could plainly discover she was not to be turned from her purpose.

"My greatest anxiety is, Mr. Banks, to pay the debt we owe you," she said, in answer to his look.

"It must be paid," groaned the old man. "It will swallow up the annuity for a dozen years or more to come."

"I have some rare jewels, sir, which are of considerable value," she said, in the earnest manner that had already won the old man's heart. "I will sell them, every trifle will help."

"God help you, my poor child. The jewels will go but little way. No ! no ! Keep 'em,"

he said, gruffly. "I'll think over this business—but I expect in the meantime to hear from you that you have altered your mind, and intend marrying Mr. Briscoe."

"Don't hope such a thing, Mr. Banks. I will never marry Mr. Briscoe," she replied, with firmness.

"Is Mr. Briscoe in the house?" he asked, as he took up his hat. "I thought I caught sight of him as I passed the dining-room window."

"He was here half an hour ago, sir. I heartily wish he would leave, for his presence only embarrasses me still more."

"Does it?" asked the old man, with a peculiar smile.

"It does, indeed, sir."

"Then you may just make your mind easy on that point," cried Mr. Banks. "I'll make him leave the house in the twinkling of an eye. Now, Dr. Vinen, shall I take you as far as Braidsworth in my chaise?"

The Rector knew his companion would not

leave without him, so he thought the best thing he could do for his dear young friend was to bid her good-bye, and go away with his co-guardian, who, the moment he was seated in the vehicle, poured forth a torrent of bitter words against Mrs. Coulson, cursing her with an intensity that completely horrified the peaceable clergyman.

“The infernal old wretch! to swindle me in that barefaced way. I only wish I could be down upon her, and I would, too, if it were not for that sweet, upright, amiable girl’s sake. Curse that swindling old hag!”

“How was it, Mr. Banks, you were induced to lend her so large a sum of money?” asked his companion.

“Because I was a great fool, and believed all the lies she hatched up about her daughter being sure to marry that proud, haughty devil, Briscoe.”

“I always thought,” said the Rector, in a quiet tone, “that Miss Coulson was engaged to be married to Mr. Gladstone.”

"So did I, and so did all her friends."

"Has she changed her mind?" asked the good Rector.

"I don't know about that," said Mr. Banks, "for I am not certain if she ever was of that mind. At any rate, I'll take care she sha'n't marry such a stuck up imbecile as Briscoe; he's not half good enough for her, Doctor, and he sha'n't have her, though my preventing his marrying her may be the sacrifice of my five thousand pounds, or thereabouts."

"Then, I fear, our ward will never marry," rejoined Dr. Vinen.

"Don't fear that. Why, upon my life, I'd rather marry her myself than let such an angel remain single!"

Dr. Vinen could not refrain from smiling, he pictured to himself old Banks making love in his thread-bare coat, harsh voice, and crabbed looks, and, more than all, with his grim smile.

"Laugh if you like, parson, but I know she would marry me if I asked her, for she's

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a sensible girl and knows what's right; yes, and what's more, she does what's right and can appreciate honest industry and merit. But here's your house, and there's Mrs. Vinen on the look out for you. Well, Doctor, laugh as you like, but leave me to manage that infernal old hag, Mrs. Coulson, so good-bye, &c

The Rector jumped out and nodded his adieu; he could not trust himself to speak, he was so tickled with the idea of Agatha Coulson becoming old Banks's wife.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE next morning Mr. Banks was disturbed an hour earlier than he was in the habit of rising by his housekeeper knocking at his bedroom door.

“What the devil’s the matter?” roared Mr. Banks, after two or three knocks.

“There’s some one wants to speak to you,” said the woman, opening the door and going into the room.

“A man or a woman?”

“A man, sir.”

“Did you tell him I was in bed?” asked Mr. Banks.

“I did sir, and told him you never got up till nine o’clock.”

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“ What kind of man is he ? ”

“ Oh ! he’s not bad looking.”

“ Silly fool ! I don’t want to know if he is good looking or ugly. Is he a gentleman ? ”

“ Oh ! yes, he’s a gentleman, and one not to be put off ; for he took a seat in your own chair just as coolly as if he was in his own house, and said he’d wait till you came down.”

“ Did you ask his name ? ”

“ I was so flustered like, that I forgot all about asking his name ; but I suppose, sir, I may tell him you’ll be coming down soon.”

“ Yes, yes ! Get breakfast ready as quickly as you can.”

The housekeeper left his room.

“ Perhaps,” soliloquised Mr. Banks, “ it is some one from Dr. Vinen’s,” and he began to dress without a moment’s delay.

On entering the parlour the master of the house perceived that his early visitor was William Gladstone.

“ Humph ! What does he want ? ” was the mental question of Mr. Banks. “ To borrow

money, I suppose, for his new start at Braids-worth. He won't get it, though," he muttered to himself.

"You are up betimes, Mr. Gladstone; I'm sorry I was not out of bed," he said sarcastically, without shaking hands.

"There's no apology needed, Mr. Banks," said William, with just as little politeness in his tone and manner as his host displayed. "You know I'm making a fresh start in life, and time is capital with me. I should have called upon you last night, only I could not have arrived till so very late."

"Is your business with me so very urgent?" asked the old man, gruffly. "What's the nature of it?"

"It's urgent enough, and my hunger is still more urgent, for I've not tasted food at present this morning, and my ride has given me a good appetite, so perhaps you will give me some breakfast."

"Well, lad, I thought you looked half starved. Here, Polly," and he rang the bell

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violently, "put the breakfast on the table at once. Let there be enough ham and eggs for half-a-dozen; Mr. Gladstone's in a starving condition."

"I shall do full justice to whatever Polly puts before me, Mr. Banks," said William, as he took his seat at the table. "The morning air has given me a tremendous appetite."

"Coffee or tea, lad?" asked Mr. Banks, as soon as breakfast was ready. "Help yourself to the poached eggs and Yorkshire ham—there's no better in all the counties of England."

"I'll trouble you for some mustard."

"There's some just at your elbow. Now, Mr. Gladstone, let me hear what brought you here this morning."

"It will surprise you, Mr. Banks."

"Will it? Then it must be something out of the way, for nothing surprises me now-a-days," said the old man. "You haven't been fishing, have you?"

"Not quite so bad as that," said William, laughing, and asking for more coffee.

"Dang it, lad, what is it?"

"Guess again."

"I can't; I'm a bad hand at puzzling out things," said the old man, getting impatient.

"You had an interview with Miss Coulson yesterday," said William, blushing as he repeated the name.

"Well, what if I had? I suppose I may see a lovely woman without asking permission of Mr. William Gladstone," retorted Mr. Banks, in a gruff voice.

"Most assuredly you may, my dear sir. I suppose Miss Coulson told you she wouldn't marry Mr. Briscoe?"

"She did, and a very foolish young person she is."

"Why, sir?"

"Why, it's like flinging gold into the sea, refusing to marry him. Who told you about my visit, Mr. Gladstone?"

"The young lady herself, sir."

"Did she?"

"Yes, and to make the matter as short as possible, Miss Coulson had, previously to her

interview with you, sir,—prior, I may say, to her discovery how seriously she was indebted to you—promised to become my wife.”

“The devil!”

“I hope not,” said William, laughing.

“Ho! ho! The cat’s out of the bag, eh? I see it all plainly enough now, why she wouldn’t marry the parson. Pray what did she say when she found out the swindling old hag, her mother, had run some five thousand pounds or more into my debt?”

“Wrote me that letter,” said the younger man, taking a note out of his pocket-book, and placing it on the table before Mr. Banks.

“Am I to read it?” asked his host, putting on his spectacles.

“Certainly.”

“She writes a nice hand,” he said. After reading a few lines, he was seized with a violent fit of coughing, and was obliged to have recourse to his handkerchief; again he read, every now and then muttering a humph! pshaw! but said not a word.

At length he refolded the letter, and ventured to look up at his companion. William saw that there was a tear in his eye.

“Mr. Gladstone,” he said, after a pause, and in an altered tone, “I would never give up such a noble-hearted girl as Agatha Coulson. Her affection is worth all the treasure there is in the world, and happy will be the man who is permitted to take such a loving woman to his heart. I once, when I was a poor man, loved a beautiful girl, who was the image of Miss Coulson,” and with this remembrance of his youthful days Mr. Banks’s feelings overcame him. Mr. Gladstone respected his grief, and spoke not; but after a time Mr. Banks resumed—“I would tell you my tale, but it was so sad—so very sad—that I will refrain from relating it.”

After a lengthened pause, Mr. Banks roused himself, and said—

“That old devil at ‘Sunnyside’ would sacrifice the happiness of her daughter, and make her marry that haughty fellow Briscoe,

for the detestable sake of living a luxurious life. By heaven ! she would, or my name's not Banks."

"You are right, sir. Mrs. Coulson is aware that if her daughter loses 'Sunnyside' all her importance will be at an end."

"A heartless old wretch !" cried Mr. Banks, who ate his ham and eggs voraciously. "Mr. Gladstone, I know you to be an upright, spirited man, and I would rather see Agatha, in whose welfare I am much interested, married to you than to that imbecile fool Briscoe—parson though he be."

"Thank you, sir."

"Well. But I must warn you that for some time to come she will bring you but little fortune, for there is my debt to repay."

"Not one farthing of which shall remain unpaid, Mr. Banks."

"You think me perfectly right in agreeing to the arrangement she has proposed to make?"

"Assuredly I do."

"Then, of the five hundred a-year she will

have, half that sum will have to be put aside to pay her mother's debt to me, and her mother will have to be secured a maintenance out of the other half, so you perceive, Mr. Gladstone," he added, with a grim smile, "you will be saddled with a portionless wife, in addition to all your other burdens."

"The prospect does not dismay me," said William, calmly. "Please God, Agatha will never want."

"It's very doubtful if Mrs. Coulson will give her consent to your marriage."

"I think she will, sir."

"Well, that's more your concern than mine, lad. Will you have anything more to eat?"

"Thank you, sir, I have satisfied my hunger and thirst," rejoined William, rising. "But—but—Mr. Briscoe—"

"Oh! Don't trouble yourself about him. I'll send him off with a flea in his ear. He's as proud as Lucifer, and blind as a bat! By Jove! I'll astonish his weak mind!"

“ Many thanks, Mr. Banks, for feeding the hungry,” said William, laughing as they shook hands at parting.

“ I like that fellow ; he’s a straightforward, plucky young man, and it may not be the worse for him one of these days.”

Mr. Banks made no unnecessary delay in going over to “ Sunnyside,” to urge Mr. Briscoe’s departure, which he did with such cogent reasons that in less than an hour after the interview, the reverend gentleman’s valet packed his master’s trunk, and that gentleman, after a no very pleasant leave of his hostess and her daughter, departed in a chaise and pair for Devonshire.

Mr. Banks’s reasons were sufficiently cogent. He informed Mr. Briscoe that himself and his co-guardian had determined not to give their consent to his marriage with their ward, and that Mr. Gladstone would fulfil the intentions of the testator by marrying Miss Coulson, with the consent of Dr. Vinen and himself, before her attaining the prescribed age.

CHAPTER XVII.

CAPTAIN VINEN had returned to Braidsworth at Christmas, just in time to make one at the family gathering at the Rectory to eat the good Rector's roast beef and plum pudding. The first visit he made was to "The Rookery," where the Gladstones had taken up their abode. He had a lengthened conversation with Frances, but what they said to each other it would not be discreet or gallant to disclose, but we may say, without any breach of confidence, that ere a day had elapsed it was known to every man, woman, and child in the parish they were to be married in the spring, and we shall

be perfectly justified in adding that the announcement was received with the greatest satisfaction by all their relatives and friends, and not by these alone, but by the whole population of Braidsworth. It may, too, be as well to state the fact that Captain Vinen did not intend going to sea again, and was looking after a good house in the neighbourhood.

When Miss Gladstone was informed by Frances of her engagement to Captain Vinen, and of her brother William having obtained Mrs. Coulson's consent to his marriage with her daughter, it became requisite, Sophia thought, that in her declining health some arrangement should be made respecting her comforts for the future ; and in talking the matter over in the evening when they were alone, Sophia said—

“ I really think this agreeable news has given me fresh strength, for nearly all my earthly wishes will be accomplished. I will make my will to-morrow, and—

"Oh! my dear Sophia," cried Frances, "do not talk so."

"Why not, my dear sister?" rejoined Sophia, almost cheerfully; "by making my will, I shall be happier, and shall not shorten my life by so doing, but I hope lengthen it. All that I possess shall be equally divided between the three whose constant care and watchfulness over my comforts and happiness have been unceasing, with the exception of an annuity to poor old faithful Hannah, fifty pounds to Sarah Crisp, and a diamond ring to Dr. Vinen."

"But," said Frances, "there is one thing troubling us."

"What is that?" asked Sophia.

"Why, under whose roof you would wish to reside. We all three are anxious to have you."

"I will decide that point, if William thinks Agatha would approve it."

"Of her approval there is not a doubt," said her brother; "if I guess your wishes,

dear Sophia, you would prefer remaining at 'The Rookery.' Agatha and I have talked that plan over, and she will be both anxious and delighted at your consenting to be still our sister, and remain amongst your pleasant flowers and birds, and—"

"You have rightly guessed my wishes, my dear brother; I shall then, after you are all married, have three nurses instead of two, and I trust, should God spare my life a little longer, to often visit both Frances and Kate, indeed divide my time between you."

The Braidsworth Foundry sprung like magic out of its ruins, and William Gladstone and James Simpkin were two of the most industrious and hard working men in the world. By the end of February the whole of the buildings were completed, and everything went swimmingly on. Trade, too, revived, and orders came pouring in, and executed with such regularity and despatch, that in a short time everyone declared the Braidsworth

Foundry would soon realise a fortune for the partners.

Mrs. Coulson was not easily persuaded to her daughter's marriage with Mr. Gladstone; but when at last she did, she acknowledged that the settlement her daughter had made upon her by Mr. Gladstone's wish was very handsome.

Sarah Crisp and Henry Jobson were busily engaged furnishing a cottage in a neighbouring village, for the brave hearted old widow would not hear of being a burden upon them.

Robert Fisher had recovered his health, but, much to the discomfort of his father and mother, had left Chilworth for London, to study at the Academy, and it was generally believed by the profession that he would attain to eminence as an artist.

* * * * *

Christmas is passed, and the sun is shedding its brightness over the lovely scenery of

Braidsworth, as well as inducing in the hearts of its inhabitants an amount of gladness which had not been felt for many years. It is May-day—and on this particular May-day the whole population of Braidsworth have dressed themselves in their Sunday clothes, and men, women, and children, have left their houses to enjoy the festivities provided for their gratification. There is not a person to be met with who not only has a smiling face, but wears a white favour. All sorts of rustic games are going on, and the bells of Braidsworth church ring out a merry peal. “The Rectory” and “The Rookery” are in a state of great excitement—four weddings had been consummated on that bright May-day—and Dr. Vinen, who had officiated in his church, had given his blessing first to William Gladstone and the high-minded Agatha Coulson, secondly to William Wilding and the beautiful Kate Gladstone, then to Captain Vinen and that self-sacrificing and ever cheerful Frances Gladstone, and

lastly, to the more humble but not the less worthy Harry Jobson and the faithful Sarah Crisp.

A huge bonfire, and the roasting a bullock and several sheep (which were distributed to all who desired to partake of them), finished up the most joyous May-day that Braidsworth had ever witnessed.

THE END.

T. C. NEWBY, 30, Welbeck Street, Cavendish Square, London.

